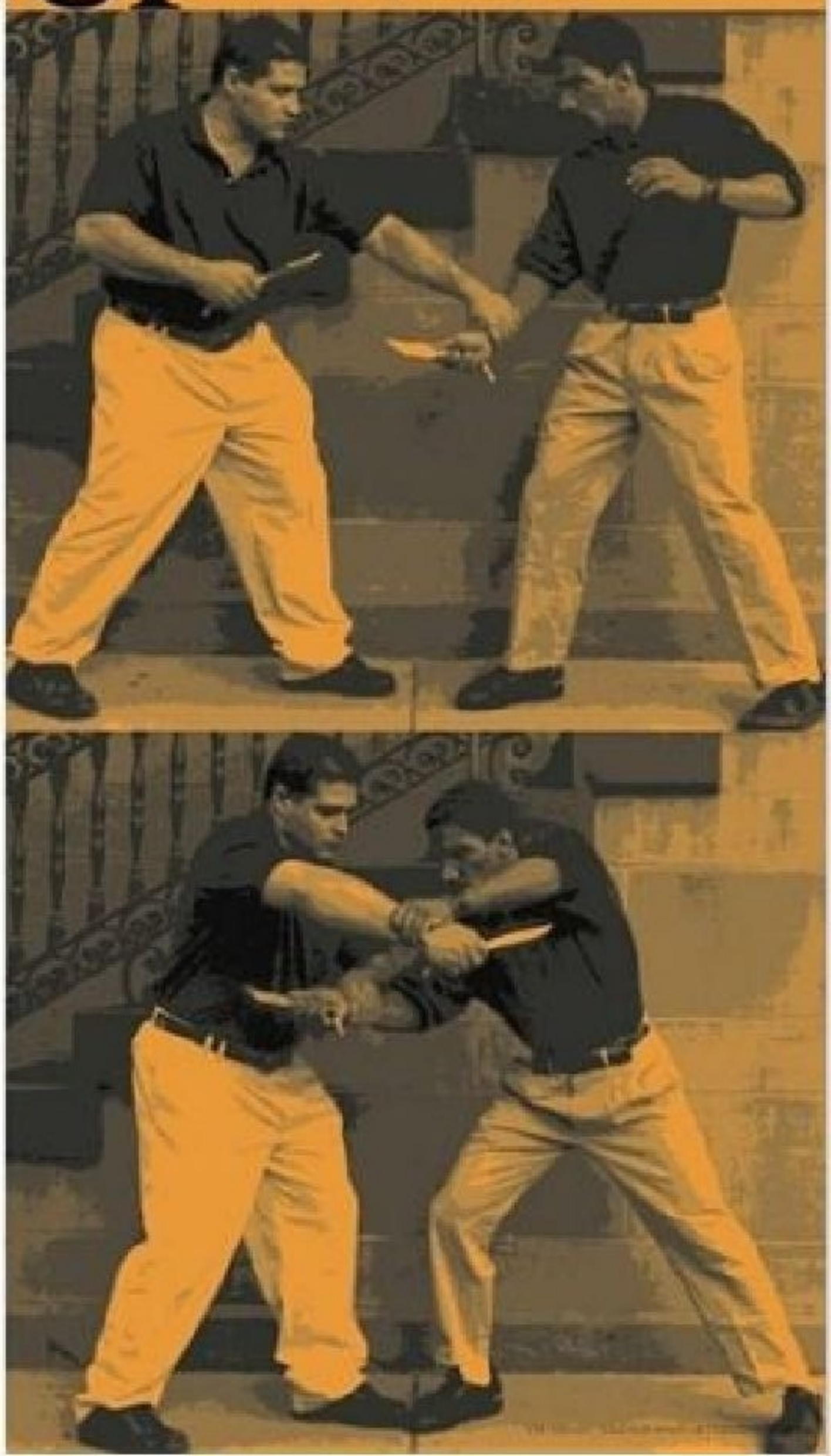
Sevillian Steel

The Traditional Knife-Fighting Arts of Spain



This work is dedicated to my mother, who allowed me to ay with real knives from the very early age of 6, and to the emory of my father, who, despite being baffled by my obses-on with martial interests, supported the endless pursuit of my karate tricks."

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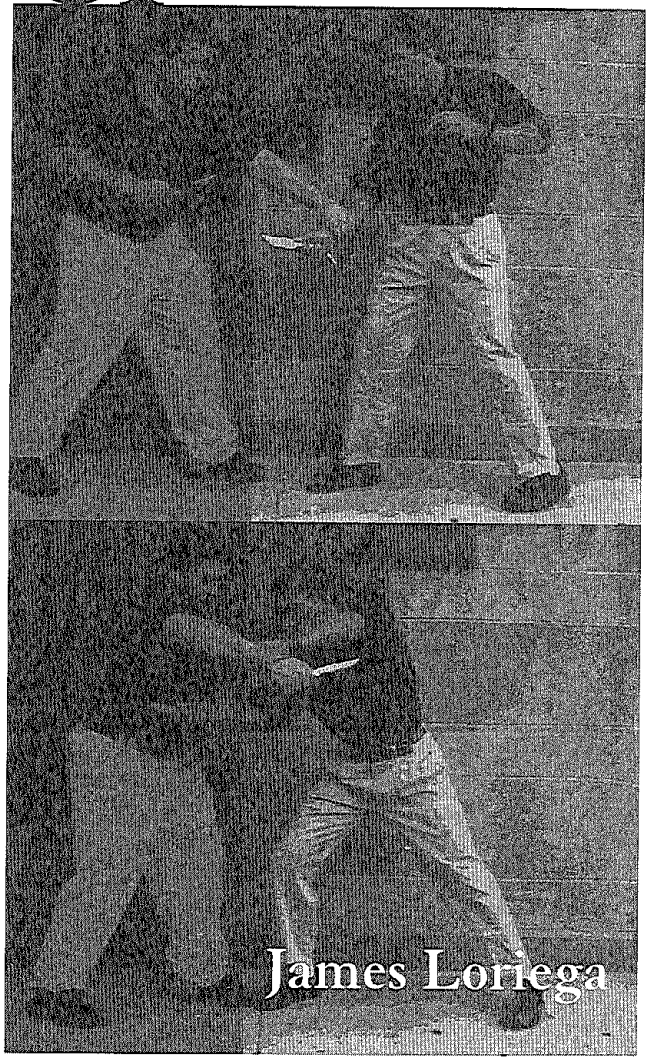

James Loriega

Paladin Press · Boulder, Colorado

:evillian Steel: The Traditional Knife-Fighting Arts of Spain
›y James Loriega

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SBN 1-58160-039-9
rinted in the United States of America

ublished by Paladin Press, a division of
aladin Enterprises, Inc.
unbarrel Tech Center
)77 Winchester Circle
oulder, Colorado 80301 USA
l.303.443.7250

irect inquiries and/or orders to the above address.

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›tography:
action sequences photographed by Lester Denmark.
still photography by James Loriega, unless otherwise indicated.

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Acknowledgments

Much of the information contained in this manual would not have been mine to share were it not for the selfless consideration of those who shared it with me. Of these, the first is my lifelong friend and ninjutsu mentor, shihan Ronald Duncan, who, since 1967, has instilled in me a fascination with weapons and armed strategies. Second is my fencing instructor, the late Monsieur Michel Alaux, who first demonstrated to me that there is such a thing as European martial arts. Third, but not least, is Don Santiago Rivera, *maestro de armas*, who humbly credited master Duncan and Monsieur Alaux with having prepared me for learning his own art of Sevillian Steel.

Apart from the cited combat masters who were indirectly responsible for the book's technical contents, I owe varying

degrees of gratitude to the following individuals for their kind recommendations, enthusiastic assistance, and unconditional support at various phases of this endeavor: Donald J. LaRocca, associate curator in the department of arms and armor, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Cristina Portell, former assistant curator of the Dahesh Museum; Pat Crawford, knife maker and designer, Crawford Knives; and Steven Dick, managing editor of *Tactical Knives.*

Finally, my sincerest thanks go to those who have been there for me over the long run: Jon Ford of Paladin Press, who never lost hope or patience; Rafael Martínez del Peral, Esq., who kindly shared his time, resources, and unrivaled expertise; my students at the New York Ninpokai and the Raven Arts Institute of Sevillian Steel, who selflessly gave of their time and energy to model what they do best; Lester Denmark, who brought his extensive photographic expertise to the endeavor; Javier Avila and Francisco Hernandez, my oldest comrades-in-arms, who take over student coordination and dojo responsibilities while I'm away; my sister, Norma, who's always been there whenever needed; and, of course, my wife, Naomi, who graciously indulges me throughout our European travels while I track down sources, materials, and "toys" for "the collection."

Author's Note

In piecing together the diverse segments of my research into the arts of the Spanish *navaja* I have often had to reconcile conflicting items of information. I have written these data down in a manner that hopefully will seem as logical to the reader as it does to me. If one or two discrepancies seem to have escaped my notice in this book, please realize that these must represent a mere fraction of the many I found and adjusted. Moreover, seeming inconsistencies should not confuse those readers who are certain to have encountered similar conflicting instruction in their study and practice of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino combat systems. Combat arts, after all, are developed and disseminated by individuals, and individuals are, by definition, as different and inconsistent as they are unique.

"Be first the master of yourself, and you will thereafter be the master of others; one must journey far through time to get to the core of anything. A prudent waiting brings season to accomplishment and ripeness to what is hidden. The crutch of time accomplishes more than the iron club of Hercules. God himself does not tame with the whip, but with time: a great truth is this: Time, and I 'gainst any two. Fortune herself crowns patience with the heaviest of garlands."

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

Warning

The information and techniques presented herein can be dangerous and could result in serious injury or death. The author, publisher, and distributors of this book disclaim any liability from any damage or injuries of any type that a reader or user of information contained in this book may incur from the use of said information. It is the reader's sole responsibility to research and comply with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations pertaining to the possession, carry, and use of edged weapons. This book is *for academic study only.*

Introduction

During the summer of 1990, when ninjutsu—the art of the Shadow Warrior—was still a favorite of the martial arts mainstream, my senior students and I visited several countries in Europe as part of a summer-long seminar tour. From France to Italy to Spain we traveled, giving weapons demonstrations and conducting training seminars in the ways of the ninja. During the limited free time we had between seminars I would scour the cities' bookstores searching for native-language martial arts books to add to my library. It was while I was thus occupied in Seville—and while my students engaged themselves in sampling tapas and drinking jerez—that I happened upon a modern *escuela de armas blancas*[1] located on a side street off the Plaza de España.

At the Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas (Sevillian School

of Edged Weapons) the training revolved around the use of folding knives and edged weapons indigenous to Spain and southern Europe. With more than 20 years of experience in handling every type of knife—from tantos to balisongs to kukris—and four years of fencing at Hunter College in New York City, I had little difficulty in demonstrating my interest in the school's focus of instruction. Martial proficiency, like music, art, and dance, can be a language that transcends and communicates across cultures.

Through the gracious cooperation of Don Santiago Rivera, the maestro de armas of the school, an informal technical exchange system was set up whereby we would train his senior group of blade enthusiasts in ninjutsu's various knife arts in return for learning the unique ways of wielding their own particular edged weapons. Extending the intended length of our stay, we managed to obtain over a month of solid training in the rarely seen knife and dagger arts of Spain.

Since 1994, we have returned to Andalusia every summer to continue exploring the finer points of the region's indigenous arts of Sevillian Steel. The training within Andalusia has extended beyond Seville to Granada, Málaga, and Ronda; training outside of Andalusia has taken us to Italy, France, the island of Corsica, and Morocco.

Readers of this book, particularly those who engage in edged-weapons combat, should understand from the outset that this book does not seek to promote the advantages or benefits of these systems over any others. While I am not so naive as to echo the popular notion that no one martial art is better than another—there most certainly are martial arts that are superior to others—I realize that not every martial art is suited to the needs of every individual. It is for this reason that we must all experiment with whatever arts capture our interests; for that is how we will discover which art—or arts—provides us with the most proper fit.

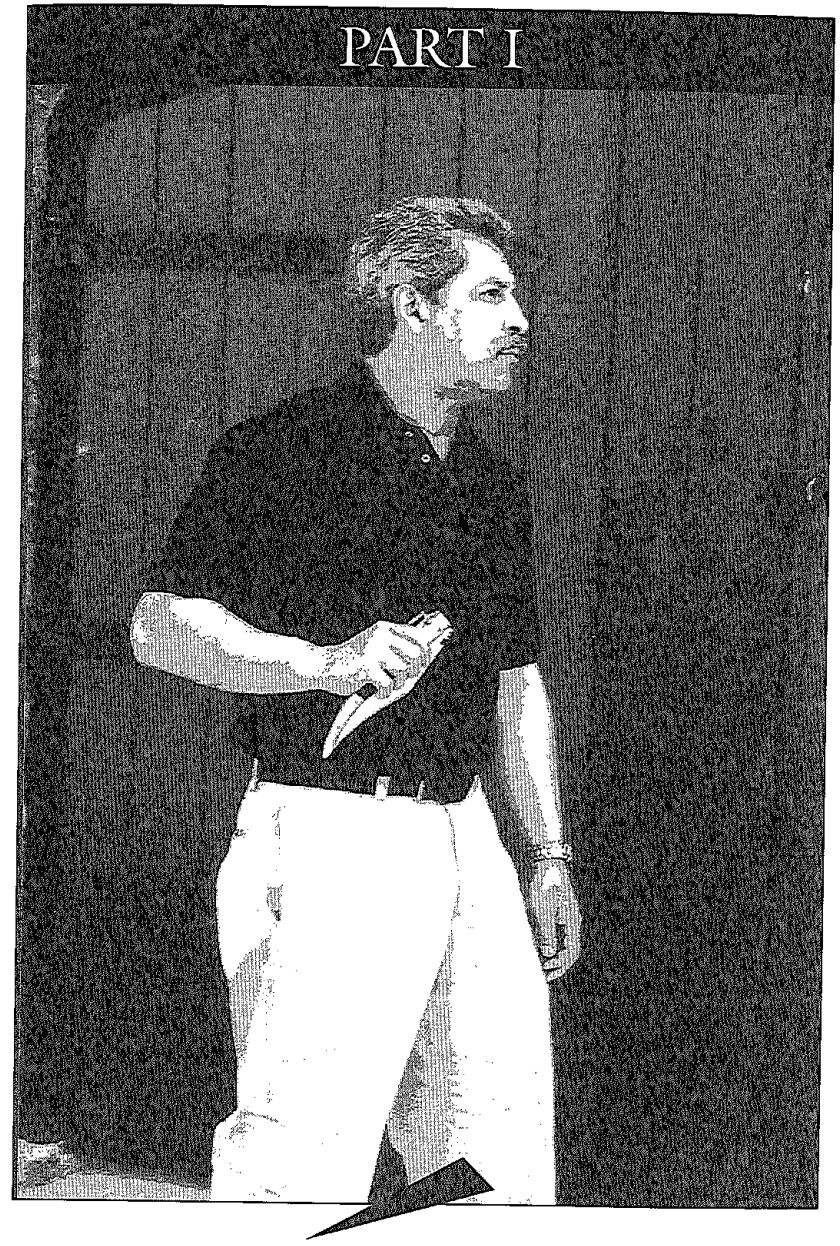
The knife, it must be remembered, is a universal phenomenon. It exists in some form or other in every culture of the world. When used for personal protection, the techniques for its deployment vary as much as one culture varies from another.

The intended purpose of this book, therefore, is not to replace what you already know of edged weapons and knife combat, but to present you with information—hopefully interesting—on arts practiced in a part of the world other than America or Asia. And if by chance you find something that complements or enhances what you currently practice, then the book will have exceeded its intended purpose.

James A. Loriega
Torremolinos, Spain

1 School of edged weapons. Throughout those southern European countries where Romance languages are spoken—e.g., Italy, France, and Spain—edged weapons have historically been referred to as "white arms." The term was initially used to distinguish between cut-and-thrust weapons, used at close quarters, and those that utilize gunpowder and are used from a distance. Thus, the Italian term *armas bianchi*, the French term *armes blanches*, and the Spanish term armas blancas represent edged weapons as a category distinct from that of *armas de fuego*, or, as we would say in English, firearms.

PART I



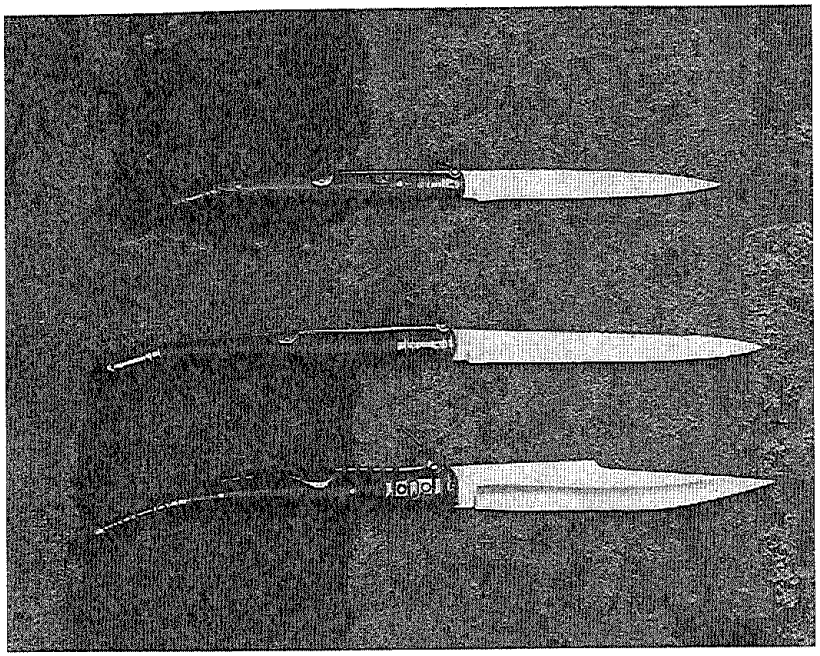
History and Background

CHAPTER 1

Andalusia and the Cradle of Mediterranean Knife Arts

Nowhere in Europe has the art of knife fighting been so culturally developed and nurtured as in the countries of the Mediterranean; and no Mediterranean country has had a historically richer knife culture than Spain. Though modern Godfather-type novels and films might make it appear as if either Italy or Sicily would be the logical contender for the dubious honor of being the European capital of knifeplay, the fact of the matter is that Spain's well-known cutlery tradition dates back beyond the Middle Ages to Roman times. Indeed, the famed rapier, generally considered to be an Italian development, is actually suspected of having a Spanish origin.[1]

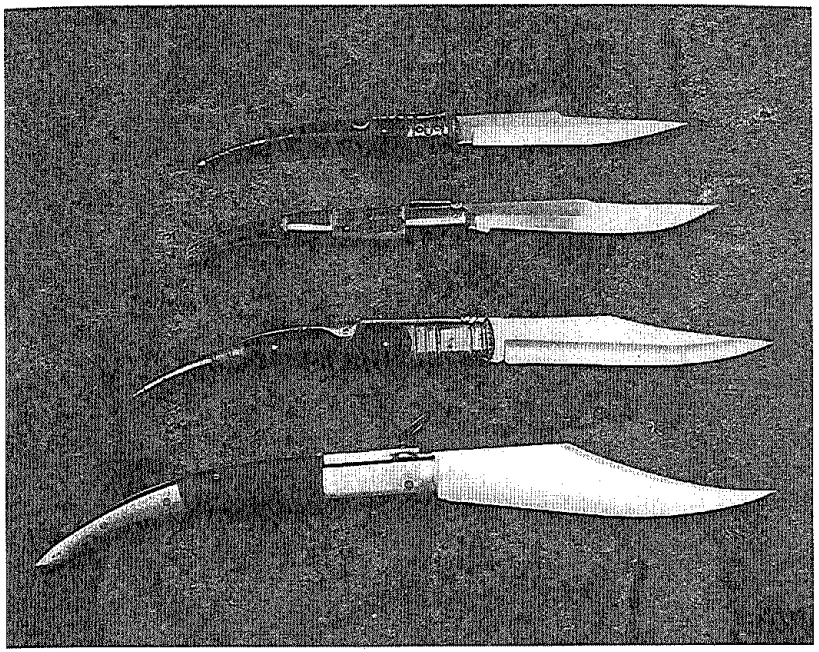
The long-standing dispute as to whether fencing as a formalized art began in Spain or Italy is yet to be conclusively resolved. Proponents of the Spanish school



Examples of the folding puñal.

advance that the first book on fencing, *Treatise on Arms* by Diego de Valera, was written in Spain between 1458 and 1471, and marks the birth of fencing as a scientific art. Others claim that Achille Marozzo's *Il Duello*, published in Italy in 1536, was the first book that could be considered an artistic or scientific approach to sword fighting. Scholarly speculation regarding fencing's origins notwithstanding, from Renaissance times it was Spain's own Toledo steel that marked the standard by which all other combat blades were measured.

The Spaniards' predilection for knife-based personal combat is evidenced by the variety of combat-type edged weapons found in their country. Fine cutlery, forged to exacting specifications, was a major industry not only of Toledo, but also of many other cities throughout Spain. Among the best known of these were Albacete, Ciudad Real, Granada, Jaén, Valencia, and Seville.



Examples of the Spanish navaja.

Knife-making is one of Spain's oldest and most respected industries, and variety in blade dimensions and design is one of its inevitable outcomes. The most generic of the Spanish knives that is suitable for combat is the *cuchillo* (cu-CHEE-yo), or fixed-blade knife. Cuchillos are single-edged and made in varying lengths and blade configurations.

While the term cuchillo may refer to any fixed-blade knife, (e.g., kitchen knife, hunting knife, utility knife), the term *daga* (DAH-ga) connotes a dagger specifically intended for combat and personal defense. Dagas are double-edged to enhance the wielder's cutting options, as well as to increase the damage caused by thrusting.

Another type of combat knife is the *puñal* (poon-YAHL), which refers to any knife intended primarily for stabbing or thrusting. The puñal is the Spanish equivalent of the weapon

referred to as a dirk in English, a stiletto in Italian, and a muletto in Sicily. Since the puñal's classification is determined by its function and not its design, a puñal can be either a fixed-blade sheath weapon or one that folds and is carried in the pocket.

The final and most colorful type of Spain's combat knives is the navaja (na-VAH-ha), or folding clasp knife. The fact that the navaja folds and can be carried unobtrusively affords it a level of civilized "respectability." Its distinctive blade configuration, suitably designed for slashing as well as thrusting, also makes it a combatively versatile weapon. It is perhaps these two attributes—portability and combative versatility—that have made the navaja popular with Spaniards regardless of the dialect they speak, the region from which they hail, the politics they hold, or the socioeconomic strata to which they belong. And it is around the use of this folding clasp knife—the navaja—that the arts of Sevillian Steel developed and evolved.

SEVILLIAN STEEL

The term Sevillian Steel, little known outside of southern Europe and the Mediterranean, is one that is used by the knife combat enthusiasts of these regions when referring to the weapons and fighting systems that originated and evolved in Andalusian Spain. Andalusia is the southernmost of Spain's 19 autonomous geopolitical regions; Seville is its capital city. Situated below northern Spain and France, Andalusia is bordered by Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean on the west and the Mediterranean Sea on the east. South of Andalusia, across the Strait of Gibraltar, lies Morocco and the northern tip of Africa. Most of the cultural phenomena that the world associates with the Spanish—such as bullfighting, fiestas, flamenco dancing, and machismo—evolved in this colorful region.

That Andalusia became a major cradle of knife combat is hardly surprising given the fact that prior to 1492 it was one of the major crossroads of the known world. Following the discovery of the New World, Seville became the gateway to the

Andalusia, the cradle of Mediterranean knife arts.

Americas. Long before then, this part of Spain had at one time or another been invaded by the most hostile warrior cultures ever to tread European soil. Among these invaders were the Romans, who once named the Andalusian capital city of Seville Hispalis (from which such words as España and Hispanic are derived); the Visigoths, who infested the region in the 5th century; and, in the 8th century, the Moors, who stayed the longest and brought the most influence. (Today there are better-preserved examples of Moorish architecture in Andalusia than there are in most modern Islamic countries.) During their tenancy the Moors renamed the region al-Andalus from which the present name of Andalusia is derived. The last masses of warriors to overrun Andalusia were the Crusaders, who wrested the region back from the Moors during the period of history known as the Christian Reconquest and reestablished Spanish autonomy.

Observing that over the ages Andalusia has been invaded by the most war-mongering peoples of the Mediterranean, 20th-century writer Jose Ortega y Gasset made the point that, like the Chinese, the Andalusians conquered all their invaders by inculcating them with their own lifestyle and culture. Ortega y Gasset

referred to this as the "mattress tactic," explaining that Andalusia's ploy for meeting the violent thrusts of its invaders was to "give way and be soft. In this way it always ended up intoxicating the harsh impetus of the invader with its delightfulness." Thus, over the span of more than 2,000 years, sword- and knife-wielding Romans, Goths, Moors, Crusaders, and untold others have cut an indelible affinity for blades on the collective psyche of those who are today called Andalusians.

1 This is suggested and expanded on in William Reid's comprehensive tome, *Arms through the Ages*, where he observes that "When the fashion of carrying a sword with civilian dress became common in the third decade of the sixteenth century, gentlemen chose the rapier as a fitting weapon. The type probably originated in Spain, as it was known in England about 1532 as the spannyshe sword, and the name appears to be derived from the Spanish *espada ropera* . . ."

CHAPTER 2

The Knife of the Common Folk

When driving through Seville, do not leave anything of value in sight . . . When walking, women should keep shoulder bags out of view if possible. Avoid badly-lit back streets at night in such quarters as Santa Cruz in Seville. Police patrols have been stepped up, but this area is a magnet for muggers, often working in twos and threes . . . If you are confronted do not resist, as thieves often carry knives . . .

Andrew Eames, Editor
Insight Guides: Southern Spain

Of the many bladed weapons, or armas blancas, that exist in southern Europe, the principal weapons used in the art of Sevillian Steel are folding knives of the type common to every country in the Mediterranean. In this part of the world, men—whether peasants or aristocrats—are intimately familiar with knives and their use as weapons from the time they are boys. The knife which is the subject of this book, the navaja, has over the centuries

enjoyed and garnered popularity well beyond Spain's borders. It can be found in many variations not only throughout neighboring Portugal, France, and Italy, but also as far north as England and Germany and as far south as Africa. In fact, the popularity and uses of the navaja transcend not only social class and nationality but also, as we shall see in a later chapter, gender.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NAVAJA

In his definitive tome, *La Navaja Española Antigua*, Madrid-based attorney, writer, navaja collector, and historian Rafael Martínez del Peral explains that "to speak of the navaja is, surprising as it may seem to some, to speak of something that for centuries has been an integral part of the Spanish. Everyone, the poor and the rich, the country dweller and the city dweller, old and young, had his own navaja, which was flaunted with pride."

Martínez's view of the navaja's role in Spanish culture is echoed by Arturo Sánchez de Vivar in his own excellently and colorfully illustrated textbook, *La Navaja Clásica*. In it, Sánchez proposes, "As fundamental as the flamenco is to our folklore, as paella is to our national cuisine, as a fan is in the hands of our women, the navaja has throughout centuries represented an essential aspect of a Spaniard's accoutrements."

Although the navaja by both name and design is undoubtedly of Spanish origin, the exact time of its creation has been the subject of much speculation among English-language edged weapons historians. In *Daggers and Fighting Knives of the Western World*, Harold L. Peterson suggests that the navaja was primarily a 19th-century weapon. He writes, "Folding knives designed for fighting became popular among the gipsies [sic], working people and sailors of Spain and Portugal between 1800 and 1850. . . ." Peterson goes on to remark that "the folding knife, known in Spain as the navaja, was the weapon of the gipsy, the peasant, the labourer, and the sailor. It could be a tool, but it was also considered a weapon."

Crediting the time of the navaja's origins to earlier centuries, Gerald Weland, author of *A Collector's Guide to Swords, Daggers, and Cutlasses*, proposes that "the Spanish clasp knife dates from at least the 15th century and was made by cutlers in a dozen cities in Spain." However, just as Peterson's estimate of the navaja's birth is a few centuries late, Weland's impression is early by about 200 years.

While navaja historian Sánchez admits that "it is almost impossible to know exactly when the Spanish navaja first appeared since what little has been written on this subject is based on theories and hypotheses rarely supported with dates and sources," his extensive research reveals that it was during the 17th century that the navaja evolved into its classic shape and that the name by which it is known became the standard.

Martínez tells us that the most important reason why the navaja became so popular at the start of the 17th century was the fact that in those times "when there was so much poverty, hunger, and all else that accompanies these . . . people needed a weapon to defend themselves against the unexpected but rampant violence they might be subjected to."

A Knife of the People

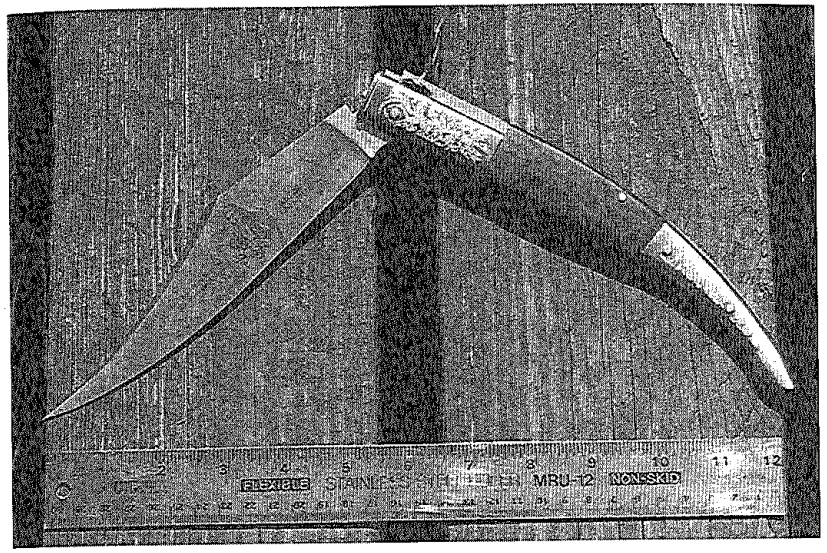
During Spain's Golden Age,[1] possession of swords by all Spanish subjects was not only permitted, but indeed, under the Catholic Monarchs and Carlos V, mandated. According to Martínez, it was not until that precise point in history when legal norms reserved use of the sword for a predetermined social class that the navaja became noticeably popular, and prevalent, throughout Spain. He elaborates, observing that "rich or poor, nobleman or otherwise, the populace, always wise and cautious, rallied toward something that provided them with the same defensive efficacy [as the sword]; and for this there was nothing better than the navaja, which in fact possessed all the qualities of the sword along with some additional advantages."

It should be noted that early Spanish navajas, while signifi-

The knives of the common folk.

cantly smaller than a sword when closed, were almost equal to the sword's length when opened. Illustrations from this period in history that depict navajas reflect their actual dimensions at the time. Thus, while providing protection that was comparable to a sword, the then-large navajas weighed infinitely less, were easily concealed, and remained safe and comfortable to carry when folded closed and tucked into the waistband. Within the next two centuries the navaja became firmly entrenched as a staple of Spanish society.

Sánchez observes, "Little by little, the navaja became more accepted, appreciated, and used by all the social classes of Spanish society; not only the working class, but the middle class and aristocracy soon adopted navajas as their inseparable companions. Evidence of this rests in the fact that many of the original samples found today in museum collections reflect a standard of materials and craftsmanship that could only have been afforded by the upper classes."



An example of a typically sized navaja.

The Navaja Recorded

The navaja's prominence as an essential element of Spanish life during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries is also evidenced by its frequent appearance in the popular literature and art of the times. Depictions of the clasp knife appear not only in instructional manuals, as shall be discussed presently, but are also widely found in the works of such renowned Spanish artists as Goya, Velasquez, Murillo, and their contemporaries. These depictions are an eloquent example of art imitating life.

Nor were the Spanish the only ones to document the navaja's presence and prevalence in daily life. The knife's popularity among the citizenry was recorded by the numerous foreign travelers and writers who journeyed through Spain in the 19th century. Theophile Gautier, the French traveler and author of *Voyage En Espagne*, observed in 1843 that "the navaja is the favorite weapon of the Spanish, especially of those who live in the cities."[2] Similarly, in *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home*, published in London in 1845, English travel

writer Richard Ford noted "It would be as unlikely for a Spanish woman to visit church without her fan, or a Spanish man to go to the *feria* [3] without his navaja as it would be for a traveler to begin his journey without his boots."

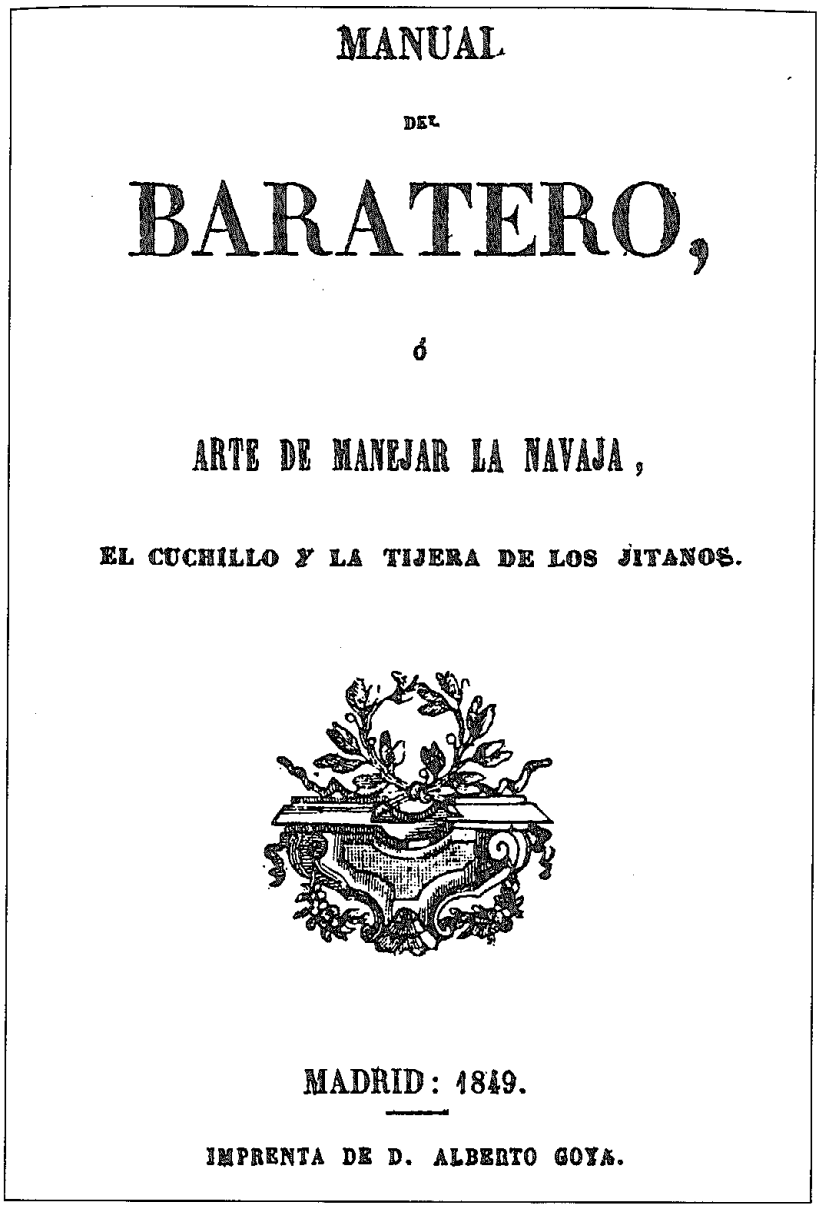
NAVAJA COMBAT MANUALS

So popular did this "favorite weapon of the Spanish" grow to become that, as might be expected, a number of manuals and treatises—some still in existence—were published on the subject of its proper use. Although their style, format, and language often borrowed from traditional fencing discourses of past eras, these handbooks were written to benefit the citizen of the times, teaching him methods for handling a navaja in self-protection from others who carried similar weapons.

One of the oldest and best-known of these manuals is titled *Manual del Baratero, o Arte de Manejar la Navaja, el Cuchillo, y la Tijera de los Jitanos.*[4] The manual, which provides detailed instruction on the skillful wielding of the navaja in personal combat, was published in Madrid in 1849 by an anonymous author identified only as "M.d.R."[5] Within its pages this manual addressed not only the use of the navaja but also, as is evident from its title, the fixed-blade knife and scissors of the Gypsies.[6]

The Spanish Manual

While the term *baratero* can be likened to a thug or ruffian, or to a person from a lower stratum of society, the intended readership of the *Manual del Baratero* was not the baratero, but the respectable working-class man. The author, the elusive M.d.R., makes many socially disparaging comments concerning Spain's "so-called decent society." He also expresses strong views against the aristocratic fencing establishment and "*el nobilisimo arte de la esgrima*" (the very noble art of fencing). His purpose in naming his work *Manual del Baratero* was to emphasize the fact that ruffians were better equipped to defend themselves than the upper classes. Thus, if the working-class man was to learn how



MANUAL

DEL

BARATERO,

Ó

ARTE DE MANEJAR LA NAVAJA,

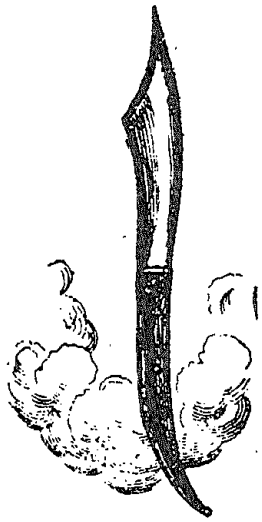
EL CUCHILLO Y LA TIJERA DE LOS JITANOS.

MADRID: 1849.

IMPRENTA DE D. ALBERTO GOYA.

The frontispiece from Manual del Baratero.

que las que puede producir el estranjero, y que recomendamos á los aficionados. Pero como la figura de la navaja no siempre es adecuada para el uso que le habremos de dar en el curso de nuestra esplicacion, diremos que la hoja deberá tener a lo mas un palmo de lonjitud, y estar perfectamente segura entre las cachas, prefiriéndose la navaja de muelle á otra cualquiera.



La figura de la hoja es de gran interés, pues no con cualquiera puede arriesgarse el diestro á tirar todo golpe indistintamente. Así, pues, será la elejida de mucha panza ácia el estremo de la punta, teniendo de tres á cuatro dedos de latitud ó sea de anchura, y con punta algo prolongada, para dar los *floretazos;* todo segun indica la presente figura.

LECCION SEGUNDA.

DE LOS NOMBRES QUE RECIBE LA NAVAJA.

La navaja recibe varios nombres entre las personas que la manejan. Nosotros no pondremos aquí todos, y sí solamente los que se encuentran mas en uso, pues cada provincia le suele dar uno.

En Andalucía la llaman la *mojosa*, la *chaira*, la *tea*, y en Sevilla á las de mucha lonjitud *las*

A sample page from the Manual del Baratero.

to adequately defend himself, he was better served by following the example of those below him than of those above.

The manual is divided into four sections and 30 short lessons (some only one paragraph in length). It begins with some cursory background information on the navaja and then proceeds to give an account of the fine cutlers found in such cities as Seville, Bonilla, Mora, Solana, and Santa Cruz de Mudela. When the "technical" part of the manual is reached, it becomes clear that the author's advice to the reader is strictly focused on survival and not the sporting rules, conventions, and etiquette of fencing (to which he at times compares knife combat). Various other strategies teach the reader to feign injury, use his hat as a parrying device, and pass the navaja from one hand to the other.

Throughout, M.d.R. vehemently advises the reader to avail himself of any trick or tactic that would give him the upper hand. As a last resort, the reader is advised to throw the navaja at his opponent to give himself time to escape in a different direction. This tactic was one already perfected by Spanish seamen who, wielding sheath knives, would hurl these at their opponents when the latter seemed to be gaining the upper hand. (As Peterson comments in *Daggers and Fighting Knives of the Western World*, "Spaniards of the lower classes were evidently resourceful in their choice of arms.")

The English Manual

Three decades after the publication of M.d.R.'s *Manual del Baratero*, the navaja's popularity was still crossing national boundaries, transcending its Mediterranean venue, and achieving published notoriety as far away as England. It was in 1881 that a pair of French travelers named Baron Charles D'Avillier and Gustave Doré published a treatise on the use of the navaja, this one written in English and published in London.[7] (Doré, incidentally, was the most popular and successful French book illustrator of the mid-19th century.) Titled *The Navaja and Its Use in Spain*, the treatise describes, among other things, how D'Avillier and Doré "had the curiosity to take lessons from a professor [of

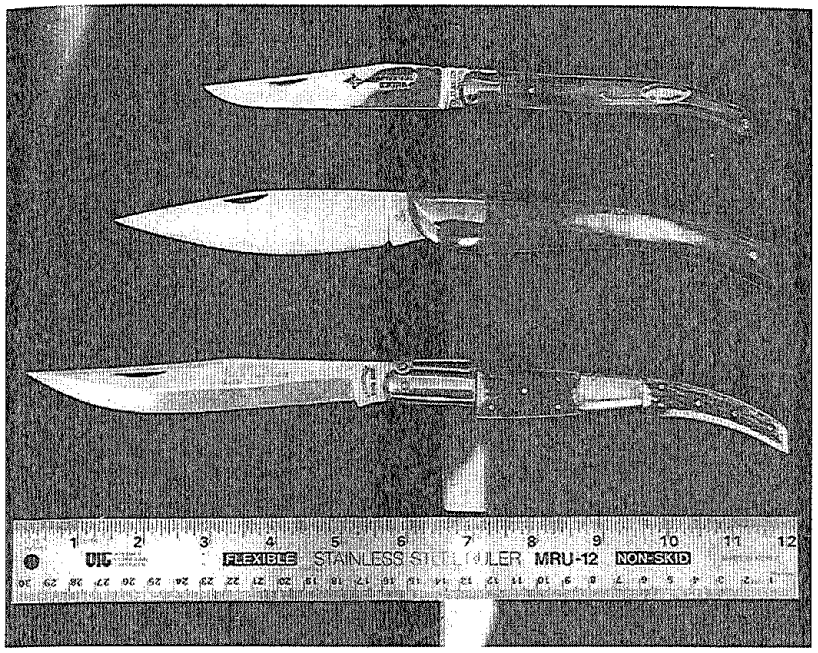
fencing with the navaja], who disclosed the secrets of his science, aided by an ordinary cane. . ." The fact that two French gentlemen objectively identify and credit the knife to Spain would seem to establish, once and for all, the issue of the navaja's provenance.

A KNIFE FOR ALL PEOPLE

Acquiring a mainstream popularity beyond their Spanish origins, large clasp knives came to be widely used throughout the Mediterranean, Western Europe, and Northern Africa during the 18th century. By the 19th century not only was there a ready market for the navaja, but other countries began duplicating the knife as well. In *La Navaja Clásica*, Sánchez states, "Due to its great maneuverability, its versatility, and the low cost of manufacture, the navaja became widely produced and used throughout Europe in the early part of the 19th century." He later adds: "In time, England, Italy, Greece, France, and Germany began manufacturing this weapon, imbuing it with their own characteristics and styling, gradually deviating from the original design." This, then, accounts for the subtle, and at times dramatic, variations in the knife's profile as it leaves Spain's proximity.

Clearly, therefore, the navaja has found its way into the hands of most Western European countries, across many cultures and throughout many centuries. Over time, Gypsies used their navajas to settle arguments with one another. Sardinians used them to carry out their vendettas. Corsican Maquisards[8] used them to assassinate Nazis. But while many Mediterraneans are familiar with its handling, it is the Andalusians who have historically excelled combatively in its use.

Thus, while Peterson has stated that the folding clasp knife could be "also considered a weapon," it appears evident from its very design, history, and traditional function that its use as a weapon was the navaja's primary intended purpose. And it is for this purpose that instruction on the navaja is still given at the Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas.



French (top) and Italian (center) derivations of the Spanish folding knife (bottom).

1 Spain's Golden Age began in 1469 with the marriage of royal cousins Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, who were known as the Catholic Monarchs. It ended in 1700 with the decline of the Spanish Hapsburg Empire.

2 *Voyage En Espagne* is considered to be the most important work of the 19th century within the genre of travel literature. For subsequent visitors to Spain, his work would become the essential literary model to follow.

3 Ferias are town fairs that are celebrated in Seville in commemoration of Holy Week.

4 Baratero has no exact meaning in English. Theophile Gautier, who traveled among them in the 1840s, translated the term as "petty thieves," but I think this is too specific. I prefer the terms "rogue" or "ruffian." Thus, the translation of the title would be, *The Rogue's Manual, or the Art of Handling the Clasp Knife, Fixed-Blade Knife, and Scissors of the Gypsies.*

5 Exhaustive research indicates that the anonymous author of this well-known and oft-cited manual was an individual named Mariano de Rementeria y Fica.

6 The Spanish term for Gypsies was spelled Jitanos in the 19th century, but is spelled Gitanos today. Both spellings are pronounced hee-TAH-nos.

7 The reader should note that in the 1840s, the French felt an evident attraction toward Spain. A great many travelers would arrive there in search of the different. The visible trace to the past, evidenced by the Gothic cathedrals, synagogues, and mosques, provided an artistic synthesis unique to the world. Thus it was that D'Avillier and Doré came to tour Spain in 1873. In 1874 they jointly published *L'Espagne*, which became "one of the most famous travel books of the century." *L'Espagne* is said to reflect "various aspects of Spanish popular life . . . the legendary and mysterious character of Spain and its magnetic appeal for the Romantic visitor."

8 French Resistance fighters.

CHAPTER 3

The Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas

Associate with those you can learn from. Let friendly relations be a school of erudition, conversation, and refined teaching. Those who accompany them form a courtly academy of gallant discretion and wisdom.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

On a cobblestone side street not far from Seville's famous Plaza de España is an ornate storefront whose large window bears the words Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas written in gold-colored, hand-painted letters. In the window's lower right corner, smaller gold letters of the same style proclaim that Don Santiago Rivera is the maestro de armas. The plentiful number of navajas and other edged weapons on display behind the large window make the storefront appear to be just another one of the hundreds of high-end tourist shops in Seville. Throughout the day visitors routinely wander in,

purchase a few of the exotic-looking navajas as souvenirs, and leave merrily on their way to continue their shopping.

Inside the "shop" a young woman named Magdalena greets the tourists in either English, French, or Portuguese, assists them with their selections, and expertly answers any questions they might have regarding their chosen knife's functions and operation. On rare occasion she will even demonstrate several deft movements with the customer's selected blade. Few customers realize that the rear section of the shop—the area that looks like a large flamenco dance hall—is the place where Don Santiago Rivera, Magdalena's father, continues to teach the art of the navaja to those who are still interested.

When, rarely, a Spanish-literate tourist asks why the sign on the window identifies the shop as a school of edged weapons, Magdalena truthfully informs him that this was the shop's original function in years past, before rising rent costs forced the proprietor to pursue a more commercial form of living. What she neglects to mention is that three days a week, from 7 to 9 P.M., a select group of trainees, ranging in skill from novice to expert and in age from 16 to 70, still meets at the Escuela Sevillana to train and socialize with others sharing similar interests.

The arts of Sevillian Steel as taught by Magdalena's father and practiced at the Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas are represented by three separate and distinct styles of blade-handling. These styles are the baratero, the gitano, and the sevillano. As each of the three styles exemplifies a specific approach to knife combat, so does each possess its own unique set of strategies, tactics, techniques, and philosophy.

THE ARTS OF SEVILLIAN STEEL

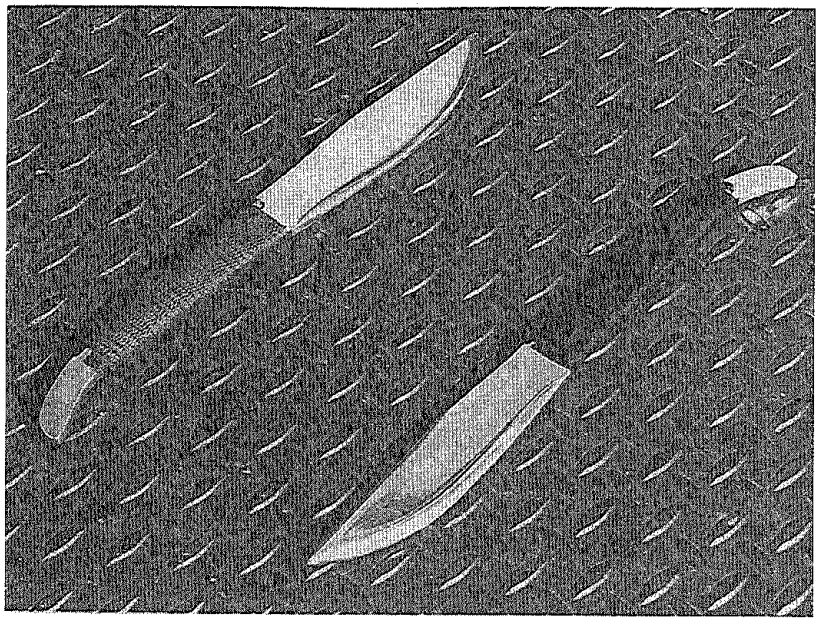
The baratero style is the most rudimentary of the three arts of blade-handling. Its basic approach stresses a straightforward method of knife combat that is solely concerned with ensuring street survival. The baratero style is the only one taught to beginners or those who admittedly enter the school merely to

learn the essence of self-protection. Strength and speed are the primary attributes of the baratero style. If a beginner endures the fundamentals of the baratero style, or if he or she demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive training, the student can then become initiated into the other arts of the *navajero*;[1] that is, the arts of Sevillian Steel.

The gitano style is, as its name indicates, one that originated with Spanish Gypsies. This style is characterized by highly stylized movements and quick, artful knife manipulations. Where the baratero style emphasizes strength and speed, the gitano style's emphasis is on dexterity and deception. Some believe that it is due to this emphasis that, among traditional navajeros, the gitano style is regarded as the "dirty fighting" method of Sevillian Steel.

The sevillano style is the most sophisticated of the three arts practiced at the school. It is a highly evolved style, reminiscent of traditional fencing but with a pronounced Spanish flair. The sevillano footwork is smooth and fluid, and the blade-handling swift, lively, and deliberately unpredictable. It is principally characterized not by strength and speed or dexterity and deception, but by skillful reliance on sound strategies and tactics. While the navaja is the primary focus of training, the sevillano style also incorporates instruction with daggers, stilettos, sword-canes, and other varieties of gentlemen's arms. As one might surmise, the sevillano style is considered to be the cardinal art of Sevillian Steel.

There are throughout Spain, of course, myriad other styles of Sevillian Steel apart from the three practiced at the Escuela Sevillana. Those styles are generally named after the cities and regions where they developed and continue to be practiced: madrileño, toledano, vasco, catalán, and so forth. These, however, according to Don Santiago, are all inferior methods. Certainly almost any Spaniard is extremely deadly with a blade in his hand, but Andalusians—specifically Sevillians—are by far considered to be the deadliest. "Those other regional styles are apt to get one killed. It is better to avoid them," stressed Santiago, "in the same way that an ugly woman avoids a photographer."



Training navajas handcrafted by Francisco Hernandez. The training navajas depicted in the techniques were handmade specifically for use in this manual. Their large size will enable the reader to more clearly understand the details of the actions. It must be noted, however, that while they appear to be of exaggerated proportions, their size is in fact typical of those navajas used in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Predictably, the operation of the Escuela Sevillana bears a greater resemblance to a 19th-century French *salle d'armes*[2] than to a Japanese dojo. Nonetheless, appearances aside, an escuela de armas blancas is as different from a traditional European fencing salon as a street-fighting school is from a commercial karate studio. And though at times Sevillian Steel and traditional Spanish fencing—*esgrima*—share a common terminology, the application of the techniques described by similar terms is as different as night and day. The escuelas take a perverse pride in having none of the superficial combat limits imposed by fencing, replacing these with uninhibited, at times savage, methods developed

not in courtly settings, but in the labyrinths of Andalusia's dark and narrow alleys and back streets.

The trainees of the Escuela Sevillana begin arriving about an hour before the start of the class to commence their individual warm-ups. (Santiago says that he does not accept stupid people as students and they would be stupid to expect him to waste their time and tuition by leading them through warm-up exercises that they can freely perform on their own.) While no formal training uniform is used, the trainees bring a small workout bag in which they carry loose-fitting clothes, black sneakers, leather wrist guards, first aid kits, and a collection of live and dulled practice weapons.

The Navajeros

The trainees come from all strata of Spanish life. For some of them the term trainee is inappropriate since, though they fully consider themselves to be Santiago's students, their formidable knowledge and skills enable them to impart expert instruction when the maestro is away on business. For example, Andrés, a senior partner in Seville's premier law firm, can often be found using his training time helping novices expand their repertoires and improve their skills. He claims his training sessions at the school provide a catharsis for the many stressors that affect him in his professional life. In actuality, it is clear that Andrés prefers the directness and honesty of an all-out cut-and-thrust combat session to the circuitous and underhanded verbal fencing he is forced to engage in during litigations.

Another formidably skilled student is Esmeralda, Santiago's niece, who helps Magdalena manage the cutlery shop by day and trains as a navajera in the evenings. Although Esmeralda's father, Santiago's brother, is also an adept navaja instructor, the family concedes that Santiago's methods of training are without equal. While she prepares to move to France to study at the University of Aix-Marseille, Esmeralda trains with her uncle to be able to contend with any potential "French contingencies" she may encounter in the neighboring country. The combined skills

gained from both her father's and uncle's instruction make Esmeralda's abilities as a navajera second only to those of Magdalena, the maestro's daughter.

Dante is one of the school's handful of Gypsy students. His independent expertise in the Gypsy navaja arts qualifies him to teach the odd class on the gitano style. A well-known flamenco dancer from the area, Dante originally began training with Santiago in hopes of learning new moves to add to his repertoire. While the diversity of Dante's dance moves has not increased under the maestro's tutelage, he admits that his original navaja skills have been enhanced more than he ever expected.

Romero, the oldest navajero at the school, had been a contemporary of Santiago's father since adolescence. Romero and the elder Rivera enjoyed hard drinking and hard fighting in the days of the Spanish Civil War. (Romero says it was he who explained the art of bullfighting to Ernest Hemingway. He has always lamented that Ernesto related to boxing and firearms, but disliked combat with navajas and edged weapons.) He trains at the Escuela Sevillana because it keeps his art in fine tune and, perhaps, because it is a place where his skill, not his age, defines him.

Like these men and women, there are dozens of other trainees at Santiago's school, all dedicated to learning, practicing, perfecting, and preserving the Andalusian legacy of the navaja. Most are native Sevillians, but a significant number of them travel three evenings a week from as far away as Córdoba, Málaga, and even Granada. They come to learn under the maestro, whose watchful eye is as sharp as his blade and whose strategies are the sharpest of all.

The Training

In the background, the music of the Gipsy Kings coming from a CD stereo component sets a proper mood for combat practice through the rhythmic sounds of a flamenco performance. The guitarists' passion and the singers' hand-clapping seem to almost dictate the trainees' timing, actions, reactions, and emotions throughout the workout. They lift and swing lead

pipes to develop strength in their hands and wrists. They cut and slash at dangling paper squares to develop their aim. They attack each other with their dulled and blunted steel knives to develop their abilities to evade and respond. By the time Santiago opens the class, all are warmed-up and ready.

The theme and focus of the training varies from day to day, from class to class. Today they may practice counter-cutting. Yesterday they may have defended themselves while sitting in a chair. Tomorrow they may spar, each opponent holding on to the sleeve of a jacket held stretched between them. No one is ever certain of what the evening's lesson is going to be. The school's only curriculum exists in Santiago's head. Whatever the lesson, however, one can be certain that the maestro has a reason for considering it important.

After class most of the trainees go off to El Rinconcillo—the oldest tapas bar in Seville—for a few drinks of wine or beers before heading home for supper, which in Spain takes place between 8 and 10 P.M. Some remain at the school to get in some additional practice with their training partners. And still others—the more astute ones—sit around with Santiago to ask theoretical questions and essentially pick his brains. (Don Santiago Rivera's philosophical insights rival the inscrutable wisdom of many of the Asian combat instructors it has been this writer's privilege to train with.) It was during these late-night sessions, often extending beyond midnight, that I learned of barateros, Gypsies, Andalusian history, and countless other aspects related to navaja culture.

A POSSIBLE ORIGIN OF THE SPANISH NAVAJA*

Sometime during the 15th century, on a cobblestone back alley in the Santa Cruz enclave of Seville, four men from different walks of life sat together in somber discussion. One was dressed in the courtly finery of the king's cavaliers. Next to him sat a dark Moor wearing drab sand-colored robes befitting a son of the desert. The third man, swarthy with quick eyes, wore the leather boots and colorful vest of an itinerant entertainer. The fourth man of the group wore the plumed black velvet hat of a Sephardic merchant. All four men had the discerning countenances of wizened travelers. Coming together after years of journeying and adventuring, the group was engaged in an earnest discussion over the relative merits of their preferred weapons.

The Moor asserted that the Arabian scimitar was the finest of all edged weapons because it best accomplished what bladed weapons were supposed to do—cut. The leather-attired Gypsy performer countered that he preferred the barber's razor to the scimitar because not only did it cut just as lethally, but it also folded to be carried hidden and unseen. With aplomb, the Spaniard smiled and reminded the Moor and the Gypsy that the rapier was the premier blade because thrusting weapons were acknowledged to have the advantage of reach over cutting weapons.

Having had their say, the Moor, Gypsy, and cavalier turned to the Sephardic merchant to see if he had such bladed wares that might satisfy their combined needs. Diplomatically, the merchant addressed his three contemporaries and said revealingly: "I wholeheartedly agree with all three of your perspectives. Certainly the scimitar's cutting edge is without equal. Similarly, the rapier's point can penetrate an enemy's skill, armor, and flesh. And

there is undoubtedly a considerable advantage in being able to invisibly carry one's source of protection. Regrettably there is nothing in my vast warehouses that would gratify your unique request."

The four men remained quiet, pondering the significance of all that had been said. Each, however, was convinced only of the merits of the weapon he had individually favored. Then finally the king's cavalier spoke.

"I feel as you probably do that there is no reason to deny oneself the benefit of the scimitar's edge," said the Spaniard. "Nor is there a reason not to avail oneself of the rapier's point. And certainly one should be able to have his weapon accompany him, secretly when necessary, whenever and wherever his destiny takes him. What I do not see is why we should have to choose one weapon over another."

"Are you proposing we each carry three different edged weapons?" asked the Moor.

"It would be difficult to afford, let alone to carry such an arsenal," added the Gypsy.

"I am not proposing that we carry three different edged weapons. The obvious answer lies in carrying a weapon that combines our three preferred attributes: a folding blade that is as suitable for slashing as it is for thrusting. One that is of adequate dimensions to accomplish our purposes, yet not so large that it is not comfortable to carry concealed. The obvious answer is not a scimitar, a razor, or a rapier, but a combination of all three."

"But the merchant just said that he has no such weapon in his inventories," reminded the Moor.

"The merchant has no such weapon now, but his artisans here in Santa Cruz can make one according to our stipulations."

With that, the Sephardic merchant smiled, and the other three men smiled with him.

** This "origin" has no basis in fact, fable, or folklore. It symbolizes merely my own postulation, however chimerical, of what could have transpired. It represents my own humble contribution to the often-indistinguishable blend of history, myth, and mystery that is the legacy of Sevillian Steel.*

1 Those who become expert in the use of navajas.
2 A salle d'armes is the French equivalent of a Spanish sala (or salon) de armas; both terms refer to fencing halls.

CHAPTER 4

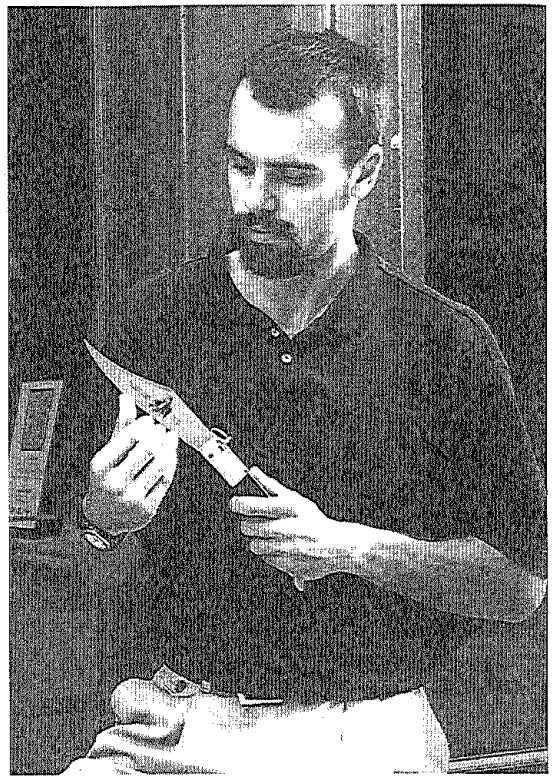
Navaja Fundamentals

The Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language defines the term navaja as: "a knife whose blade can be folded into its handle in such a manner that its edge is covered and contained by the handle's two liners." With only slight variations, the navaja is similarly defined in the multitude of Spain's other dictionaries and encyclopedias. Understandably, navaja scholars take exception to these definitions as they can basically be used to describe any folding knife, failing to denote those specific design characteristics that tangibly distinguish the clasp knife from an ordinary pocket knife or a barber's razor.

DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

The classic navaja's artistic design reveals a very pronounced

Arabic influence, not surprising since Spain was the unwilling host to the Moors from 711 to 1492. (One meets with the Moorish inheritance at every turn in Andalusia, although at times the influence is so sublimated into the local culture that its origin is almost invisible.) Judging from the many fine specimens of original navajas that have survived to the present, it is clear that the knives varied considerably in size. Their distinguishing features, of course, were constant.



The navaja's edge begins parallel to the spine, flares to a belly, then curves up to a point.

The spine of the blade is usually straight or subtly convex. The navaja's edge begins parallel to the spine, flares to a belly, then curves up to a point. Despite their reputed lowly peasant origins, the steel of many original navajas was fine and well-tempered. Its single-edged blade could range from 3 to 4 inches to up to a foot in length. The average blade length of a good-sized navaja today is between 5 and 6 inches.

The handles of the navaja are often fashioned from horn or wood over iron liners. The shape of the handles curves downward in the direction of the edge of the blade and the handles taper from the hinged end to the end that covers the point of the

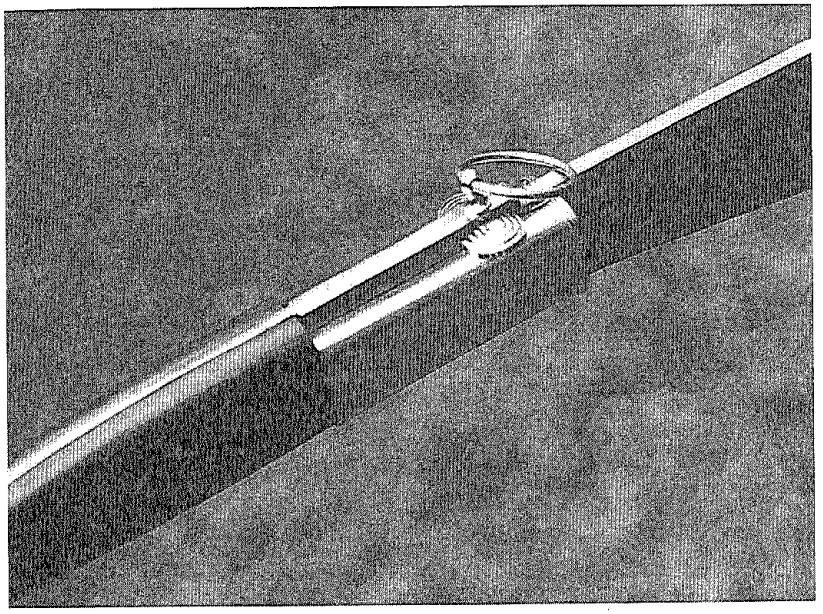
blade. While very ornate navajas have survived, the typical peasant's navaja—being a functional knife—was often plain and devoid of decoration.

OPERATION

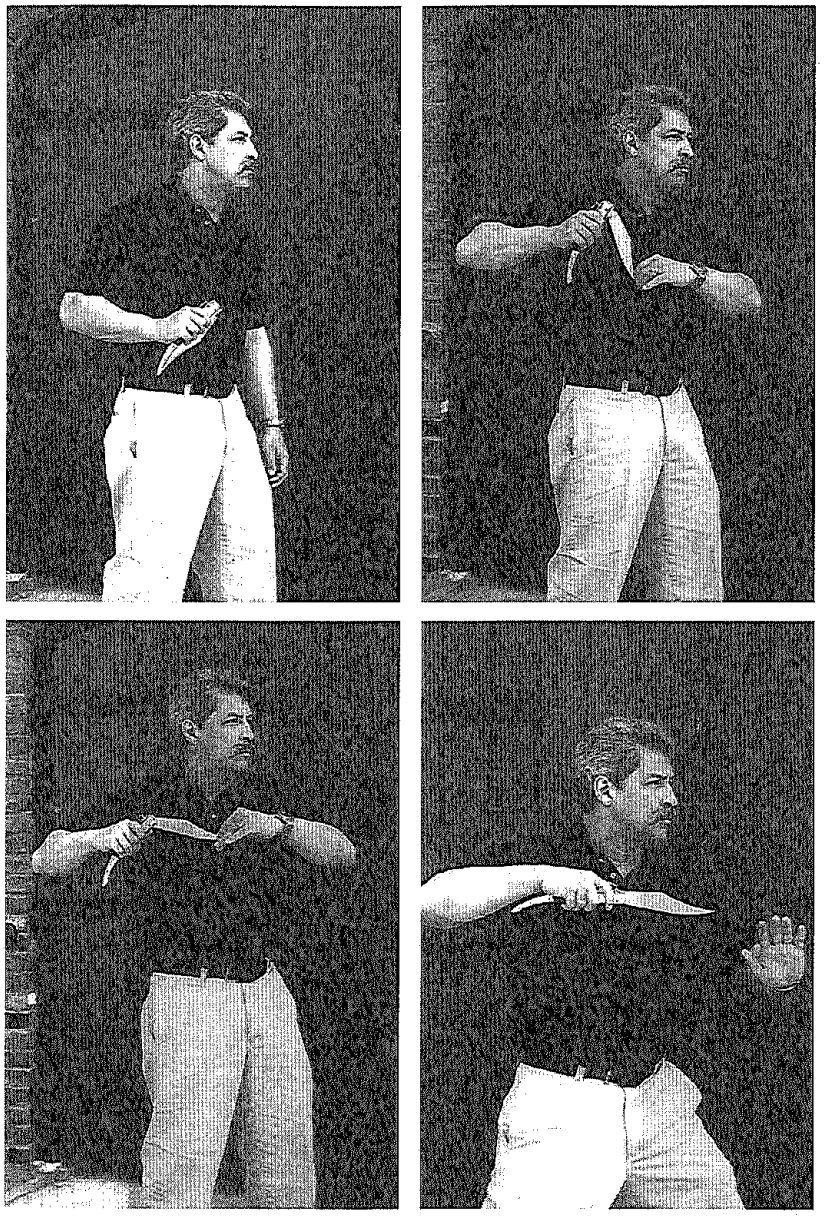
The operating mechanism in the navaja is surprisingly sophisticated given its centuries-old origin. The blade is locked into an open position by means of a spring catch. To close the navaja one must pull up on a clasp, flange, or ring in order to release the catch (see detailed explanation below). The release of the catch allows the blade to be returned to a closed position.

Opening the Navaja

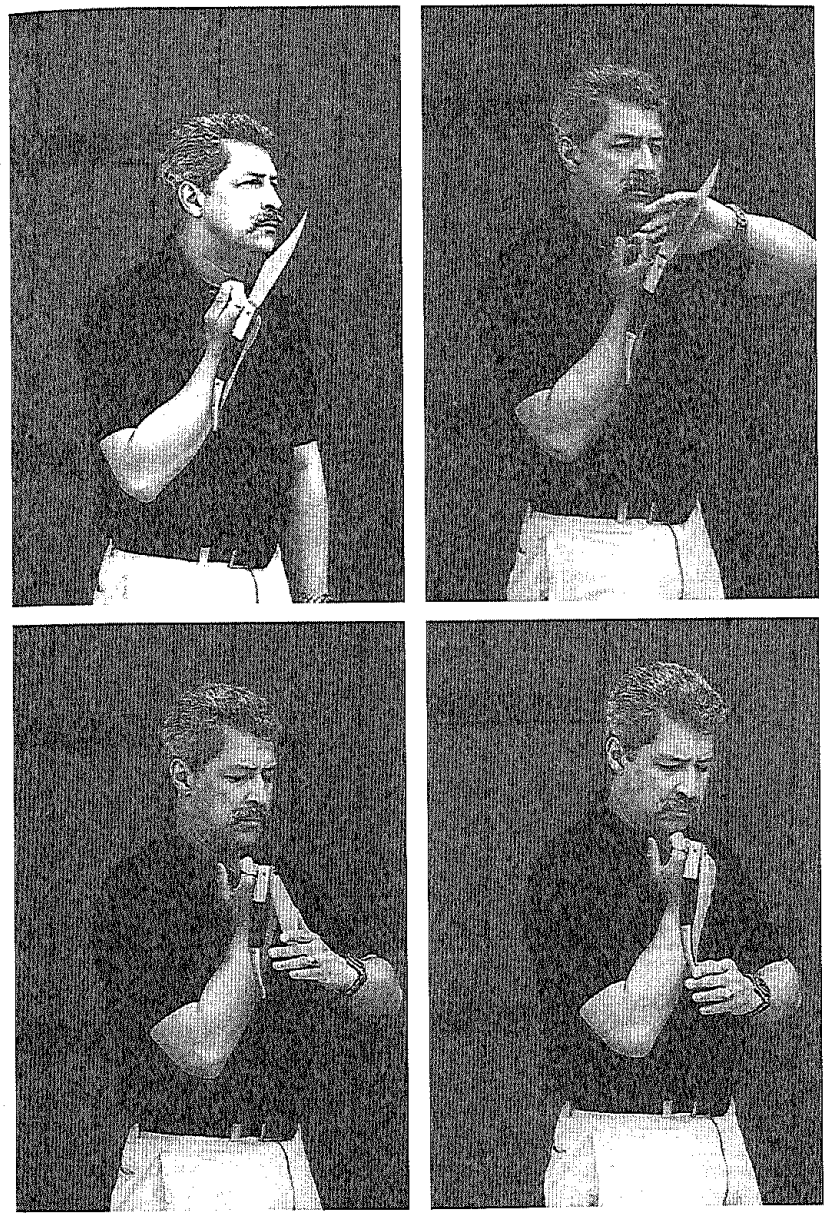
Opening the navaja is accomplished simply by holding the handle firmly in the right hand, placing the left thumb in the



View of the ring that releases a locked sevillana-type navaja.



Opening the navaja.



Closing the navaja.

thumb groove, and pulling the blade into the open position. (If the knife is a true sevillana, you will hear the click-click-click sound as the ratchets pass the spring catch toward the open position.)

Closing the Navaja

Closing the navaja takes somewhat more practice to accomplish than opening one. The most common method, with the knife pointing up and the edge facing away from you, is to insert your right index finger in the knife's ring, or to slip it under the clasp on knives where no ring is available. The three other fingers of the right hand are braced against the top of the navaja's handle. (Care must be taken that the three fingers are not wrapped around the handle and in the path of the closing blade.) The palm of the left hand is placed over the spine of the blade. Then, as the right index finger pulls up on the ring (or clasp) to release the spring catch, the left hand presses down on the spine of the blade to close it.

TERMS FOR THE NAVAJA

Throughout its history, the navaja has been known by a variety of names as diverse as the many who drew it from the tops of their boots, the folds of their sashes, or the depths of their pockets. The original Latin term for the knife was *novácula*. In time, throughout Spain's many autonomous regions there evolved a variety of related names for the knife: in Valencia they called it *navaxa*; in Catalonia it was called *navalla*; to the Basques it was *navala*. When Castillian became the predominant dialect in Spain, its term navaja became the country's standard.

While it may seem that the varied regional jargon related to navajas could be disregarded as trivial, insignificant, or anecdotal, becoming familiar with these terms is actually considered essential for Santiago's students. By hearing how a knife-wielder refers to his navaja one can reasonably determine where the man is from and, more importantly, what style or strategy he is apt to use.

COMMON NICKNAMES FOR THE NAVAJA

The acceptance of a standard name for the navaja did not prevent the widespread use of vernacular to continue to occur. In fact throughout Andalusia, the navaja's birthplace, the knife was commonly referred to by such terms as *abanico*, which means folding fan; *herramienta*, which means tool; *hierro*, which means iron; *alfilér*, which is a sharp pin, and other terms such as *santoria, santolio, mojosa*, and *faca*. (As we shall see, Spanish Gypsies, or Gitanos, also had their own names for this, their favorite weapon.) Of the many appellations by which the navaja is known, the two most familiar to all Spaniards are *sevillana* (pronounced seh-vee-YAH-na) and *carraca*.

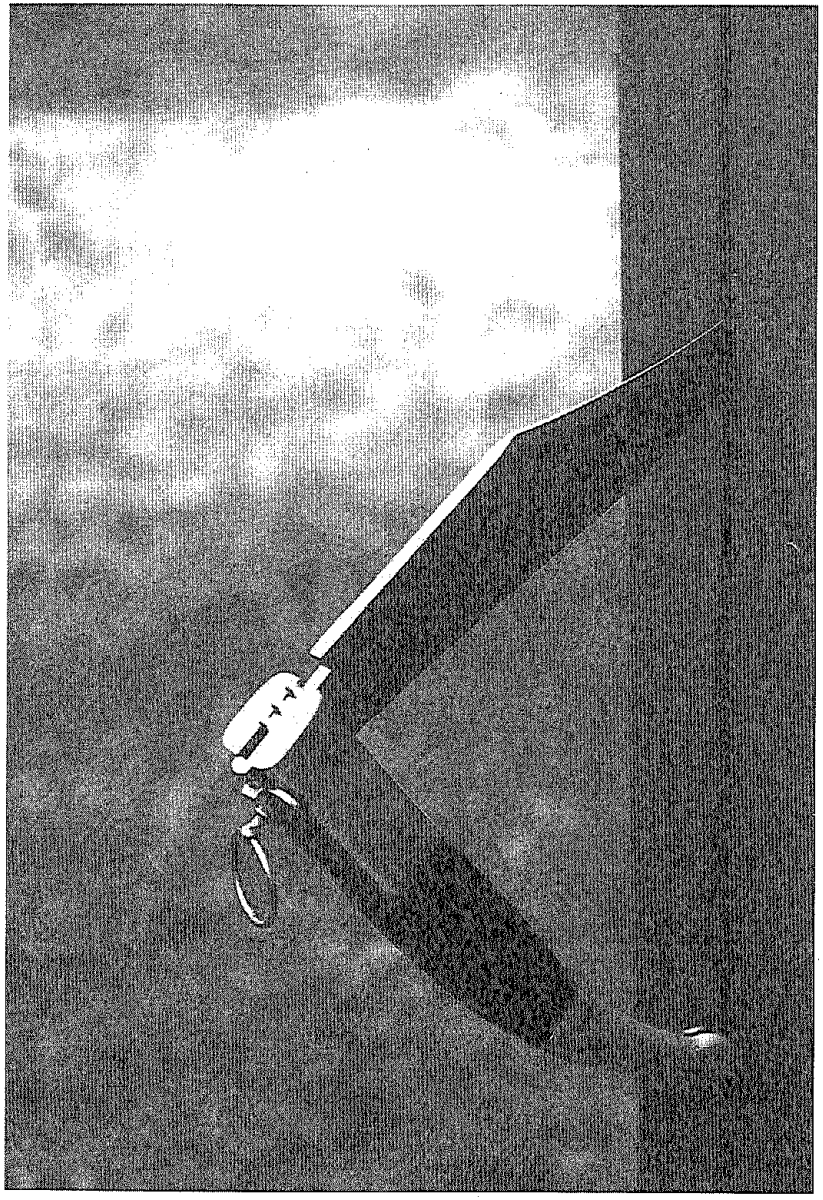
The Sevillana

While the Spanish city of Toledo has as its most prominent industry the manufacture of knives and swords, it was the city of Seville where the navaja earned its reputation as the lethal blade of the Mediterranean. In point of fact, among Sevillians the term navaja is used to refer to any folding clasp knives, whereas those knives specifically intended for fighting are referred to as sevillanas.

Given the fact that any navaja's design would seem to automatically classify it as a fighting knife, I asked Santiago's daughter what distinguished a sevillana from the typical navaja. In the characteristic Spanish manner of answering a question for which they feel the response is obvious, Magdalena, exasperated, replied, "*La verdadera sevillana tiene dientes.*" ("The true sevillana has teeth.")

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The citizens of Seville are extremely proud of their city and its unique history. Predictably, they are highly selective about the use of their city's name. The term sevillana is thus reserved for a special type of flamenco dance, a special type of navaja, and all the women who are born to their special city.



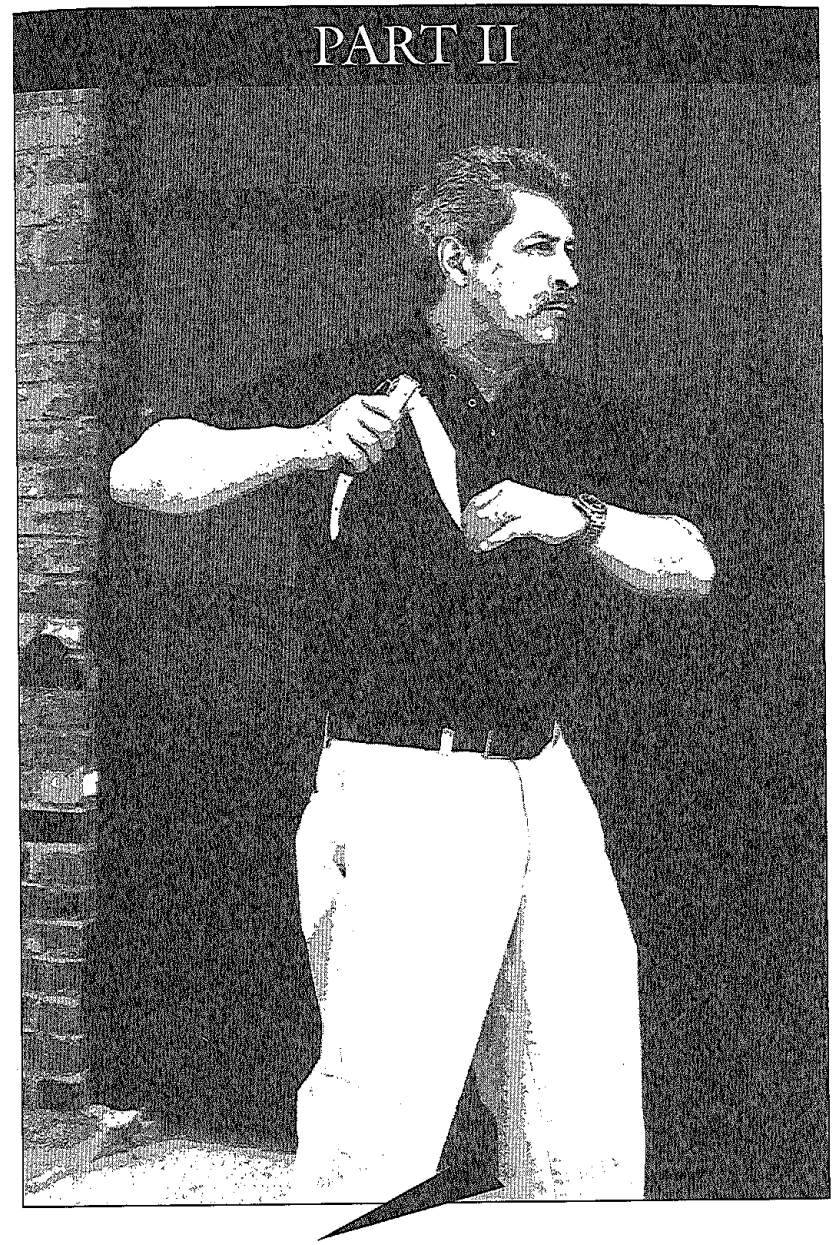
The teeth of the sevillana.

The Carraca

At first I thought she was being poetic, implying that a sevillana is capable of inflicting a substantial bite on an opponent. As it turned out, however, she was being quite literal in her reply. The "teeth" she referred to are the ratchets cut out at the end of the blade's spine and housed in the sevillana's handle. While a simple navaja may have only one ratchet (to keep it locked in the open position,) a sevillana can have nine or more ratchets that comprise intermediary locking points. Each ratchet is audibly engaged by the clasp's spring catch as the sevillana is being opened. More importantly, the ratchets are also engaged when the knife is being closed, preventing the razor-sharp edge from snapping down on the fingers as the blade is being folded downward.

When the sevillana is quickly pulled open, the ratchets scrape past the spring catch in rapid sequence. The resulting sound accounts for the other name by which the sevillana is commonly known: carraca. One can be reasonably certain that in times past, when conflicts were settled with blades instead of firearms, the foreboding "car-ra-ca" sound of a sevillana being pulled open had the same daunting effect that the jacking of a pump-action shotgun has today.

PART II



Styles and Tactics

CHAPTER 5

The Baratero Style

There is much to be considered before the sword is drawn. Men of peace should project for themselves the final scene of the play before they step onto the stage of battle.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

THE BARATERO STYLE

The techniques for using the navaja—that is, the arts of the navajero—were originally developed by members of the working class, who combined fencing principles with the indigenous street-fighting methods of their geographic regions. Although inevitably the tactics used for fighting with the navaja vary among families and individuals, certain fundamental techniques are common in its use: among these are the grip, the combat crouch, and the offensive and defensive movements performed with the weapon. The baratero style, which represents the most

basic style of those that employ the navaja, provides a proper starting point for understanding the core of the art of Sevillian Steel.

Grip

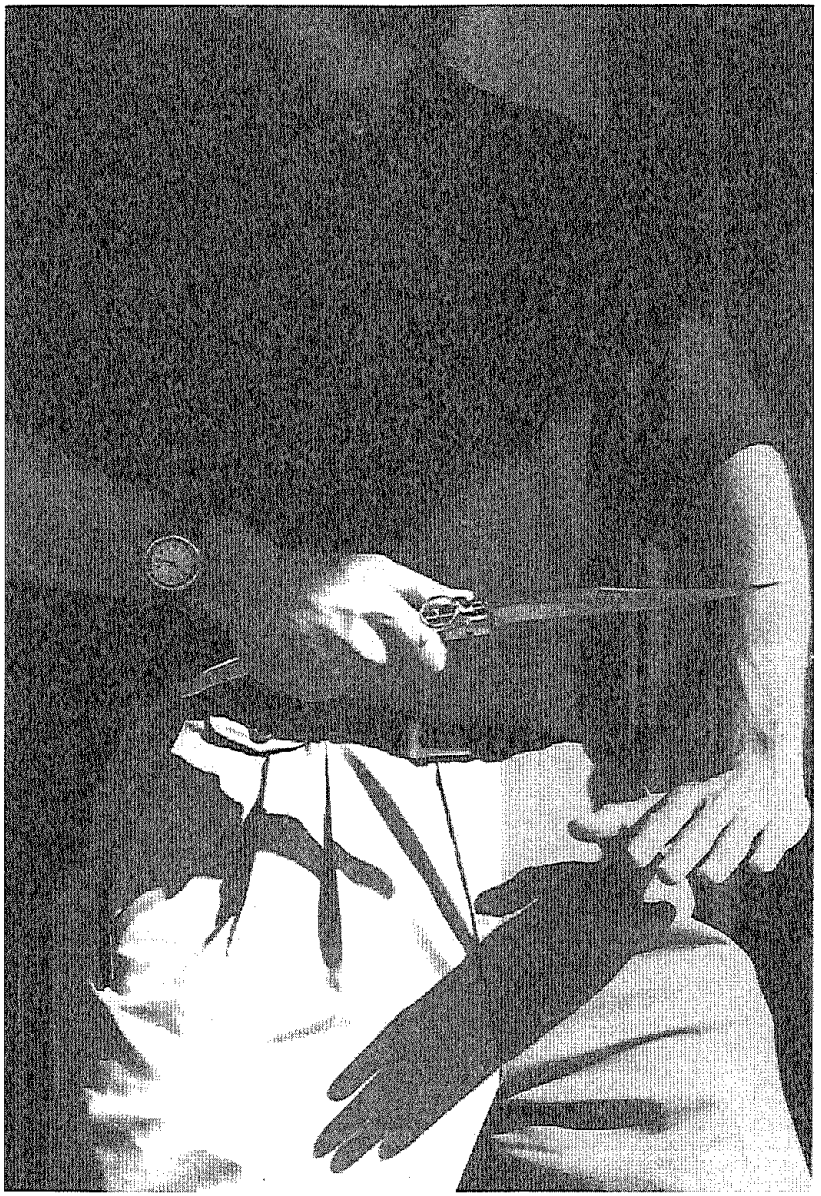
The ability to hold the navaja properly is critical to success and survival in personal combat. An improper grip may not only cause the wielder to lose the knife, it can actually result in his own hand being cut since most knives lack a crossguard. To prevent this from happening, the navaja is held in a saber grip, with the first three fingers wrapped around the left side of the knife's handle and the thumb placed on top and behind the spine.

Apart from the standard saber grip, other grips seen in combat are the foil grip and the inverted, or icepick, grip. The foil grip is favored by those navajeros who prefer thrusting to slashing. The inverted grip is rarely seen except during close-quarter clinches when opponents attempt a navaja technique known as the *desjarretazo*. The more skilled navajeros change grips smoothly in response to the needs and opportunities of combat. The most skilled of navajeros cannot only perform these grip changes with both hands, but also manage to pass the navaja from one hand to the other in a manner that at times appears to be almost invisible. This fluid and extremely lethal ability in handling the navaja requires years of practice, along with a thorough mastery of footwork, feinting, and foisting skills.

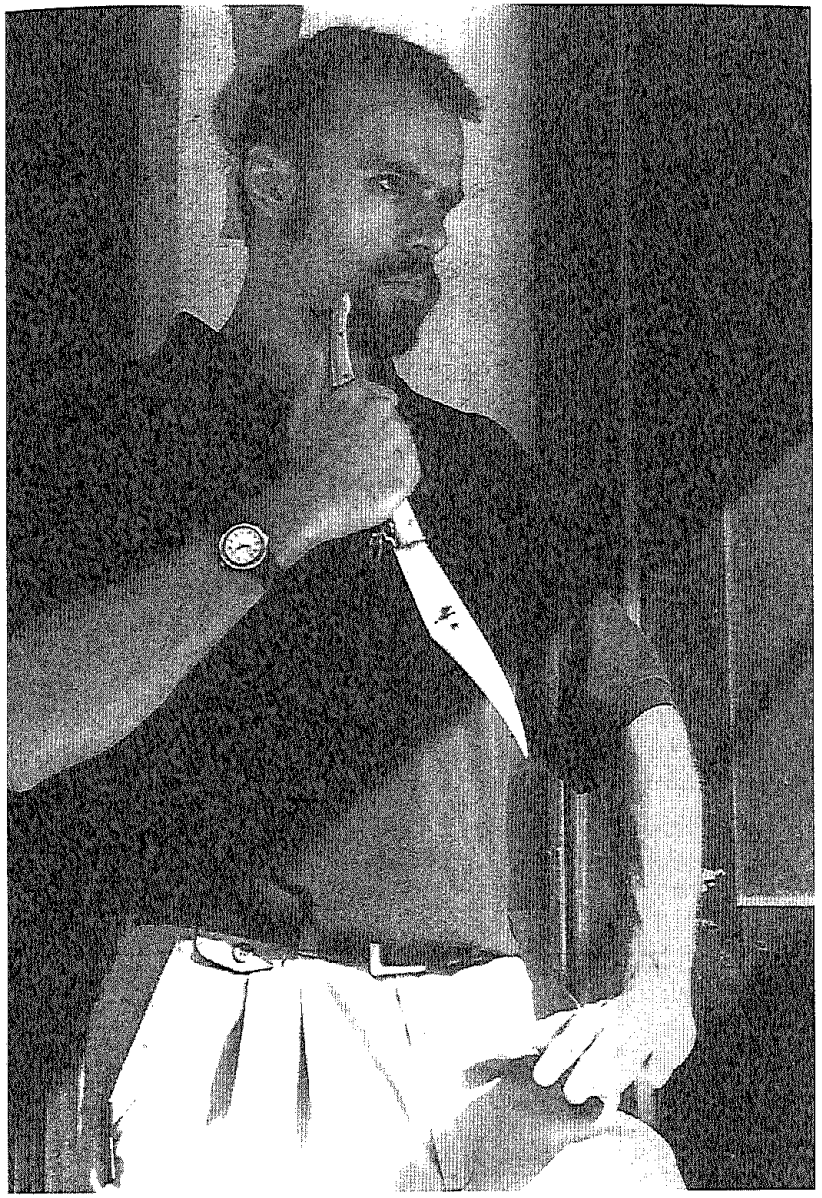
The Guard Position

The basic stance used in most styles of Sevillian Steel is called the *guardia*, or guard position. The navaja is gripped in the dominant hand with the blade's edge angled slightly toward the free hand. The free hand, referred to in some styles as *la mano siniestra*, is held in front of the navel below waist level. The purpose for keeping the empty hand in this area is to protect the abdomen, as well as to facilitate the foisting of the weapon (see below). The midsection should be pulled in slightly, but not so much that the face becomes a target by default.

The saber grip.



The foil grip.



The inverted, or icepick, grip.

Combat Crouch

The motions of attack and defense with the navaja are initiated from a basic combat crouch, which is a position assumed with both knees flexed. The weight is distributed fairly evenly between the two feet, although some navaja fighters place slightly more weight on the lead leg. In either case, the center of gravity is kept low for stability. The legs are kept about shoulder width apart, and the rear leg is turned to point out to the left about 45 degrees (assuming that the navajero is leading with his right leg). The heel of the lead leg and the toes of the rear leg are generally kept on the same imaginary line.

The hand holding the navaja floats in front of the lead hip as the knife is partially extended toward the opponent. The free hand is held in front of the left hip or navel but kept gracefully in constant motion to reduce its accessibility as a target. The eyes are kept deliberately unfocused and directed at the opponent's shoulders and chest area.

Footwork

It has been observed that Andalusians move in a characteristically deliberate and identifiable manner that distinguishes them from other Spaniards and Europeans. It is a sure-footedness that reflects not only their physical balance but also, more significantly, their emotional equilibrium. This steadiness is observable in the matador, the flamenco dancer, the horseman, and the Gypsy. The style of movement inevitably pervades all their actions, but is most notable in the performance of activities strictly Andalusian—activities such as dancing, bullfighting, and navaja-wielding.

Although the original Spanish school of fencing was renowned for its overdeveloped footwork and obsession with geometrical stepping patterns, these attributes were fortunately not carried over into the arts of Sevillian Steel. Despite the fact that many of the tactics and strategies of swordsmanship were modified for the knife and dagger, the footwork for the latter weapons remains essentially intuitive rather than prescribed.

At times a navajero will lead with his armed side; at other times he will lead with his unarmed side, reserving his weapon toward the rear for momentum. His advancing and retreating will occur in a circular manner rather than the typical linear directions common to fencing. His footwork, like that of the flamenco dances indigenous to Andalusia, will take him wherever he wants to be with little regard for symmetry or convention. Like the flamenco, it will also be innately coordinated, fluid, graceful, and careful though seemingly done with abandon.

Feints

Feinting is a common tactic in knife combat, and in this the arts of Sevillian Steel are no exception. Feints are used to distract the opponent's attention and elicit reactions, causing him to expose himself to actual attacks that might otherwise not be possible. As in all combat arts, the feint must be convincing—that is, perceived as an actual threat—in order to be successful. Santiago teaches that feints are most effective at the very early stage of engagement, when the opponent does not yet know what to expect from you and therefore takes every perceived threat very seriously.

The speed with which the feint is performed is critical. It must be slow enough to be seen by the opponent, but fast enough to avoid interception by his countercut. The actual intended attack that follows the feint must be even quicker, with the fighter changing the direction or angle of his attack before the opponent realizes he's been faked. Basic feints in the baratero style include:

- feinting high, attacking low
- feinting low, attacking high
- feinting left, attacking right
- feinting right, attacking left
- feinting a thrust, delivering a slash
- feinting a slash, delivering a thrust
- any combination of the above

If and when combat extends beyond the early stage of engagement, the skilled opponent may become slightly familiar with your feints. At this point, the fighter may resort to a type of feint known as a foist.

Foists

The foist, called a *cambio* (literally "change") in the language of the baratero, is a maneuver that takes full advantage of the fact that the hand is indeed quicker than the eye. It consists of making an overt attack toward the opponent with the right hand while actually tossing the navaja across, catching it, and attacking him with it in your left hand. As is the case with feints, foists must be performed very quickly. (Readers who recall the Hollywood-staged knife fights in films such as *West Side Story* will understand that the choreographers were lamely attempting to depict foists when the characters tossed their switchblades back and forth from one hand to the other.)

Foists are accomplished in either of two ways. In the first, you tentatively direct an attack toward the opponent's head. The attack is intentionally made at less than full speed in order for the opponent to see it, evade it, and get a false sense of security. As you retract the navaja back from your tentative attack, you very quickly pass it to your left hand and launch your second, actual, attack at your quickest speed.

The second way to foist the navaja requires even greater speed and should be attempted at a moment when you sense the opponent is least wary of your actions. If such a lapse in his attention occurs, quickly pass the knife to your left hand first and immediately feint an attack with your empty right hand. As he reacts by either avoiding the "attack" or responding to it, slip in your actual attack from his blind side with your armed left hand.

As the reader may suspect, foists require great speed in order to deceive the opponent, and they require much practice and coordination to be successful. Proper timing will be the most critical element in the foist and will be the determining factor in whether you succeed in cutting or being cut.

CHAPTER 6

The Gitano Style

Gypsies, like other townsfolk, carry horn-handled navajas tucked into their waistbands. They depend on the knife for numerous tasks, not the least of which is relying on its sharp point to defend themselves.

Jose Carlos de Luna
Gitanos de la Bética

While most Spaniards are reluctant to recognize it, those from Andalusia will not deny that the much-maligned Gypsy has made notable contributions to the Spanish culture. (Not all of these, the Spaniard will hasten to add, have been good.) The gitano style is the most rhythmic and explosive of the three taught at the school. Its influence lends a natural grace and fluidity to the synergistic integration of hand and knife, of flesh and steel. In this indigenous gitano style, combat with the navaja, even during training where it lacks lethal intent, becomes a literal dance of death.

GYPSY CULTURE

Gypsies, it must be admitted, possess an amazing culture. It has been observed that they are the only group of people who've populated every corner of the world without the benefits of power, money, armies, or ever having fought a war. They can be found on the plains in Hungary, the steppes of Siberia, the highlands of Guatemala, and the bazaars of Marrakech. Typically, they are fragmented into groups sometimes referred to as nations or tribes, and generally defined by their geographic area of settlement or recent origin. Among the various tribes of Gypsies currently found in Europe are the Manouche of France, the Sinte of Germany and central Europe, the Romnichals of Great Britain, the Boyash of Romania, the Rom of Eastern Europe, and the Gitanos of Spain.

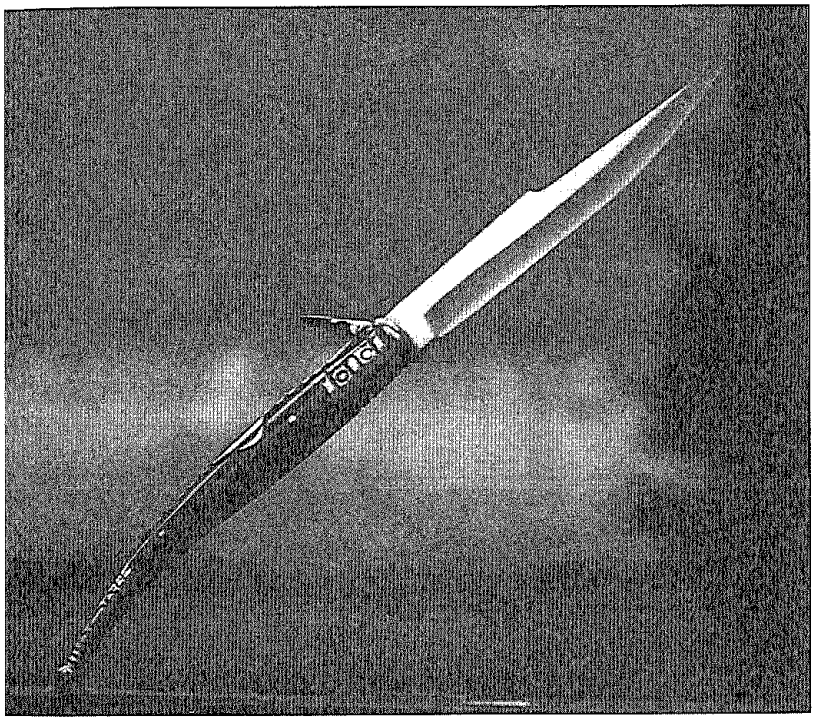
The Gypsies of Spain are unique in that they are not nomadic and speak Caló, a dialect of the "official" Gypsy language known as Romany. And though the Rom that live in the United States generally view the term Gypsy as a perjorative, there's no stigma attached to it in Seville and it is the term they prefer.

In Moorish Spain, Gypsies enjoyed full freedom under Muslim rule. Their situation changed, however, after the Christian Reconquest in 1492. Traditionally they have occupied positions of low prestige and tended to engage in economically marginal activities. They generally pursue inherited occupations, including music and entertainment, blacksmithing and basket-making, peddling and small-scale commerce, fortune-telling, curing, and other quasi-legal crafts.

Of course, not all of Spain's Gypsies are involved in these pursuits. Many, if not most, of Spain's highly respected matadors have been Gypsies. The famous Sevillian bull-fighting rivals, Joselíto el Gallo and Juan Belmonte, were of pure Gypsy lineage. Their inherent attributes of bravery, elegance, and arrogance brought a sense of style and panache to the bloody sport. Their sword-handling was exceptional. Another prominent matador, José Cándido, was noted for killing a bull with a dagger in one hand and his hat, used as a lure, in the other. As might be expected, the sword was not the only type of blade that Gypsies handled well.

The Gypsy's Navaja

For the Gypsies of old, the navaja was literally a tool of their many trades. Indeed, in times past, many Gypsies "earned" their living at the point of their navajas. Although many Gypsies do not read or write, they are capable of readily assuming the languages of their host countries. Never conforming to the mainstream culture, the Gypsy refers to his "tool" by a number of terms different from those used by Spaniards. One such Gypsy term for his navaja is *serdañí*. Some rare serdañí, such as the one



The Gypsy's serdañí.

depicted here, are unique in that their design allows them to be categorized—and used—as either a puñal or a navaja.

Another term by which the Gypsy refers to his navaja is carraca. This, noted earlier, is a term derived from the sound that multi-ratcheted navajas make when they are quickly pulled open. Since many a wealthy traveler willingly surrendered his purse to Gypsy bandits upon hearing the ominous "car-ra-ca" sound that accompanied their demands, the term has been co-opted into the modern navaja culture.

Dancing and Fighting

According to Sánchez, still another Gypsy term for the navaja was flamenco. Of course, the term flamenco primarily applies to the music and dance for which Andalusia is famous. Nonetheless, it is hardly surprising that the term is used with relation to blade-handling when one realizes that, so far as the gitano style is concerned, there are many parallels between the art of the dance and the art of the knife. Sevillian blade-handling, like Sevillian dancing, is equal parts passion, skill, and strict discipline. In both physical pursuits the movements are more than expert; they are innately natural, even intuitive.

The correlation between Spanish dancing and dueling was formally noted as far back as 1599 when, in his classic *Paradoxes of Defence*, English swordmaster George Silver grudgingly conceded that Spanish swordsmen "stand as brave as they can with their bodies straight upright, narrow spaced, with their feet continually moving, as if they were in a dance, holding forth their arms and rapiers very straight against the face or body of their enemy." When a Gypsy *bailaor*[1] dances flamenco, he is at once fluid, deliberate, and masterful. When a Gypsy navajero produces a knife, the same fluidity, deliberateness, and mastery are apparent. There is not a sense of their ever having learned their respective disciplines; rather there is the impression that they must have moved like this all their lives.

Achieving Duende

The epitome of skill among the most proficient navajeros in

A dance of death in an illustration by Gustave Doré.

the gitano style is the ability to reach the state known as *duende* (DWEN-deh). The word duende literally means "demon" or "spirit." Achieving this state—whether in dance or in knife combat—implies the presence of something magical or supernatural; that one is moving as if possessed. The state is more difficult to explain than to understand. In traditional flamenco, duende is considered "a form of involuntary inspiration that takes over the dancer and exalts his dancing to a high art." Just as the quality of duende is not programmable in dance, so is the gitano style of the navaja at odds with the concept of rehearsal.

When a Gypsy navajero is threatened he draws his serdañí. With his knife drawn, he does not follow any strict rules of steps or techniques; instead, his movements surge up as instinctive and spontaneous expressions of the moment. In essence then, achieving duende signifies a kind of possession by some mysterious force, driving the navajero to a lethally artistic display of ability that far exceeds the bounds of mere technique. Duende, there-

fore, becomes a quality or state to strive for—regardless of which navaja style one practices—whenever your knife is in your hand and your life is in the balance.

Other areas of the art of Sevillian Steel where the Gypsies have made specific contributions, discussed in chapters that follow, are in their use of natural cures in the effective treatment of fight injuries and in the lethal manipulation of scissors as a deceptively deadly weapon of combat. In a balanced manner that is often a characteristic of Spanish Gypsies, one contribution promotes the health of the navajero, while the other almost always results in the death of his opponent.

1 Andalusian dialect corruption of the Spanish word *bailador*, or dancer.

CHAPTER 7

The Sevillano Style

Do not engage with him who has nothing to lose. It is to fight at a disadvantage, for the other enters without encumbrance, unaccoutered even of shame . . . never expose to such great hazard your treasured reputation: what has cost you years to attain can go to perdition, and there be lost in one unlucky moment what has cost much precious sweat.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

Don Santiago Rivera once said, "A navajero must fight with the cunning of a Moor, the passion of a flamenco dancer, and the courage of a bullfighter. Should any of these qualities be lacking, the navajero will not be in control of the outcome. Should any of these qualities be lacking, he should walk away from the fight. He should throw away his sevillana or give it to someone who will use it properly."

The sevillano style represents the quintessence of

Andalusian edged weapons combat. The comprehensive methods embodied in this style go well beyond superior navaja play to encompass techniques with the *daga* (dagger), *puñal* (dirk), *bastón* (walking stick), *estoque* (sword-cane), and various other types of traditional arms. Understandably, our discussion here will be limited to the navaja, as that is the subject of this work.

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

In the art of Sevillian Steel the basic tenet concerning combat engagement distance is that one must always remain at least a thrust's distance away from the opponent. When there is less distance between combatants, there is a substantial risk of not being able to defend quickly enough against an opponent's attack. On the other hand, when there is a greater distance between combatants, one may have difficulty in delivering an attack without the other's perceiving it.

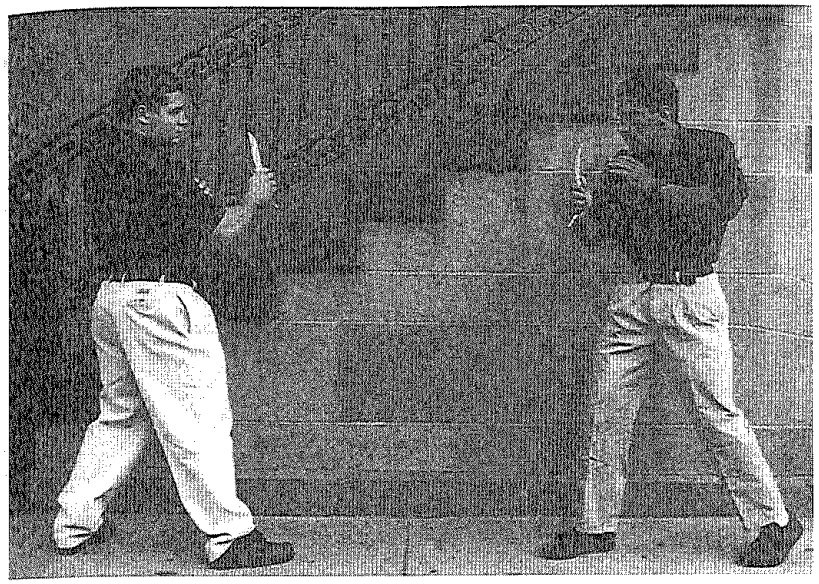
There are three primary combat engagement distances, or intervals, with which a navaja fighter must become familiar. He must be able to adjust easily to any of these three intervals and become comfortable using them in combat. The skilled fighter must be confident that he can apply his techniques, tactics, and strategies deliberately and effectively at any interval, never allowing a negative mind-set to creep in. He must be able to change and flow from one combat interval to another with fluidity, confidence, and ease.

The Three Distances of Engagement

The three primary intervals of combative engagement with which the navajero must become intimately familiar are as follows:

- *mano a mano* (hand to hand)
- *cuerpo a cuerpo* (body to body)
- *ojo a ojo* (eye to eye)

Mano a mano refers to the distance between opponents in

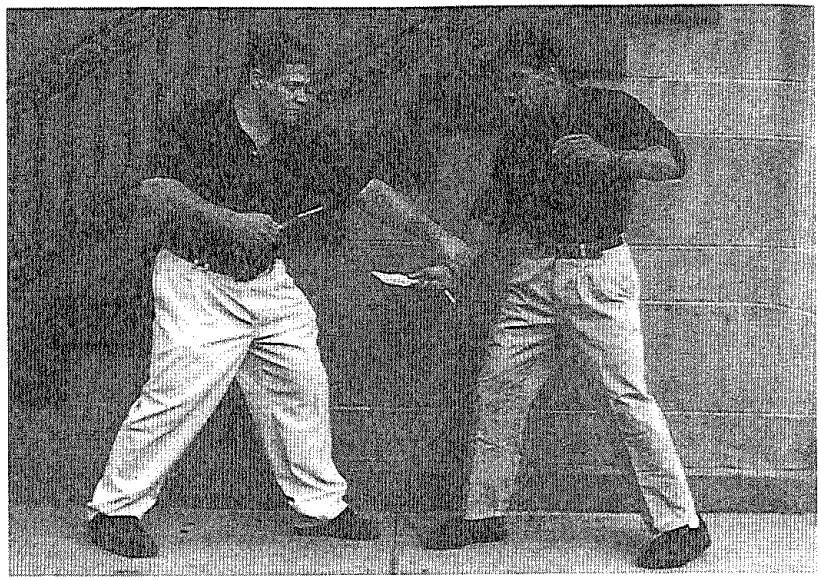


Mano-a-mano distance.

which it is only possible to deliver an attack by stepping forward. As mentioned earlier, it is the basic combat engagement distance in which one remains at least a thrust's distance away from the opponent.

Cuerpo a cuerpo refers to the immediate striking distance between opponents who are in such close proximity that they can strike just by moving their hands. At this distance, superior skill will determine who is the better fighter.

Ojo a ojo refers to close quarter combat engagement. At this distance, the opponents are face to face; hence the term ojo a ojo. This combative interval is referred to as *en quattrochi* in Sicilian knife combat. The fact that there are terms for this perilous combat proximity in all Mediterranean cultures indicates how gravely important this distance is considered. Old Spanish navajeros say that there are only two times one finds himself ojo a ojo: once when he threatens or challenges another and the other when, in the process of fighting, one of the two is about



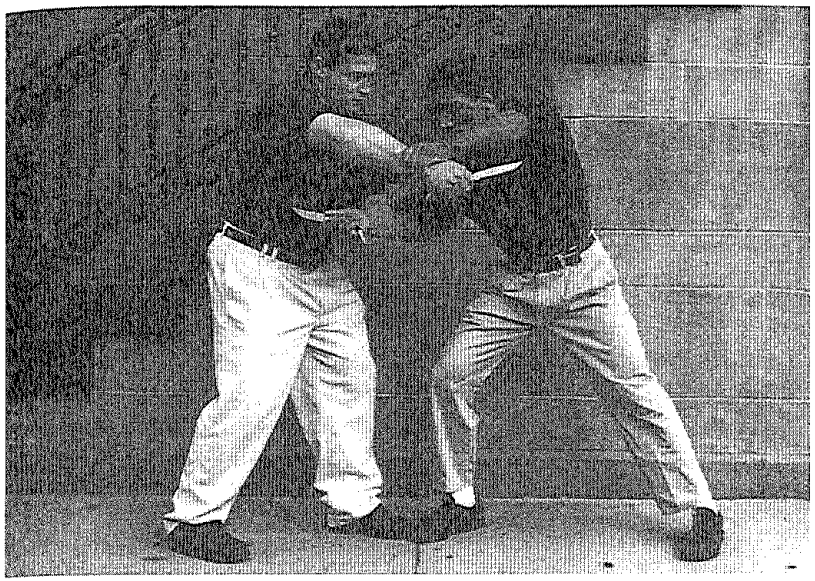
Cuerpo-a-cuerpo distance.

to die. The navajero must always remember that ojo a ojo should be avoided. Above all, he must never forget: he who controls the distance controls the fight.

The Strategies

What most distinguishes the sevillano style from the baratero and the gitano styles is its skillful reliance on sound strategies and tactics. The sevillano style places great emphasis on the fighter's strategic attributes rather than on his use of any specific combative techniques. The techniques, after all, are only as effective as the skill of the person performing them, but the fighter's strategies and tactics determine whose overall skill is superior.

The importance of this was demonstrated during a session one Saturday evening at the school, which was the time reserved solely for sparring. The Saturday sessions began at 6 P.M. and lasted till about 10 P.M., after which everyone set out, tired but enthusiastic, for dinner and drinks. As I waited my turn on the floor, I often sat



Ojo-a-ojo distance.

next to Don Santiago, who would comment to me on the sparring taking place without taking his eyes off the players. Invariably he would accurately predict the eventual victor of each sparring match within three or four seconds of the match's start.

On this particular evening I was fortunate to witness a match between two senior members. One was Diego, a Gypsy student who was a protégé of Dante's. The other was Antonio, the grandson of Don Romero, the school's oldest navajero. As the two men began pacing and stalking each other on the floor, I recalled what I knew of their personal fighting styles. Antonio was generally cautious and reserved, what one would consider a defensive fighter. During solo training he was methodical but tireless, relentlessly practicing basic thrusts and slashes to a point beyond boredom. Diego, on the other hand, was regularly flamboyant and energetic. In practice, his footwork was fast and deceptive. His navaja was never still. During this sparring match, both opponents were remaining true to character. As we

watched, Santiago casually remarked, "Toño is going to destroy the Gypsy."

"Really?" I asked. "It looks to me as if it's Diego who is going to be dancing a flamenco on Antonio."

Without diverting his eyes from the action, Santiago succinctly replied: "Well, that is what it looks like to you!"

I was ready to take offense at the maestro's nonchalant slight when, in a blur of whirlwind action, Antonio deflected Diego's straight attack and trapped his knife wrist. Before the Gypsy could pass the navaja to his free hand, Antonio—from ojo-a-ojo distance—rained six or seven lethal cuts in rapid succession. I felt more surprised at the outcome than Diego appeared to be.

Santiago looked at me and smiled. I ignored his smugness and asked how he was able to call such an unexpected outcome to the match. Clearly the Gypsy, Diego, possessed greater speed than Antonio. How did Antonio slaughter him like that?

"The outcome of the match was not unexpected," corrected Santiago. "I think even Diego half-expected it. He was probably just happy that it had been a dulled training navaja in Toño's hand instead of his favorite sevillana. As for his possessing greater speed, perhaps that is true," Santiago conceded. "But that is all he possesses; and speed is only one-quarter of what is needed to survive an attack."

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously. "If speed is one-quarter, what is the rest of what is needed to survive?"

The maestro became animated whenever he explained anything of a strategic or philosophical bent. "There are generally four factors, or variables if you wish, that significantly affect the outcome of a combative encounter. These are strength, speed, skill, and strategy."

"Where the stronger fighter is more experienced, strength overcomes speed," he explained. This we already knew. He continued, "Where the faster and lighter fighter is more experienced, speed defeats strength." We knew this, too. "However, superior skill defeats both strength and speed. And superior strategy will almost always defeat superior skill." I wrote this down.

THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF MANHOOD

There is an ancient but valid belief with regard to sex that Spanish navajeros, bullfighters, marksmen, and others who engage similar activities hold in common. That view is that there is an undeniable and direct correlation between one's ability in these activities and one's sexual prowess. While navajeros believe that sexual energy should be reserved and channeled into a pending fight, preferring to engage in sex after their combat, many modern-day matadors and marksmen make it a point to engage in passionate sex before a fight or a match.

It follows then that, if as is generally believed, the knife is the quintessential phallic symbol, then knife combat can represent an ultimate test and measure of manhood between men. In this sense, knife combat is the most basic of armed martial skills that pits not only man against man, but manhood against manhood. It is for this reason that the outcome of personal combat with either knives or swords has always been regarded as a matter of honor. This is especially true for Andalusians who, even today, remain creatures of nature, childlike in their enthusiasms, with emotions close to the surface and an urge to live each moment vividly.

CHAPTER 8

Offensive Techniques of the Navaja

CATEGORIES OF ATTACK

The Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas, as is typical of other Spanish schools of edged weaponry, does not use or have a formally written curriculum of instruction. Like most maestros de armas, Santiago teaches his style to each student in the class individually, according to the person's age, size, physical build, skill level, and ability to comprehend. Apart from beginning with the baratero style, progressing to the gitano style, and graduating to the sevillano style, instruction does not follow any particular sequence. That being said, it must be noted that the classification of techniques that follow merely represents my own meager attempt to categorize the various thrusts, slashes, and other attacks practiced at the school. Also, keep in mind that this book is just scratching the

surface of the art of the navajero, presenting only the most elementary forms and techniques.

Golpe

In Sevillian Steel, the most basic type of an attacking action with the navaja is known as a *golpe* (GOL-peh), which in Spanish means a blow or a strike. The first distinctions that must be made are between the two primary types of golpes: *puñaladas* (thrusts) and *tajos* (slashes).

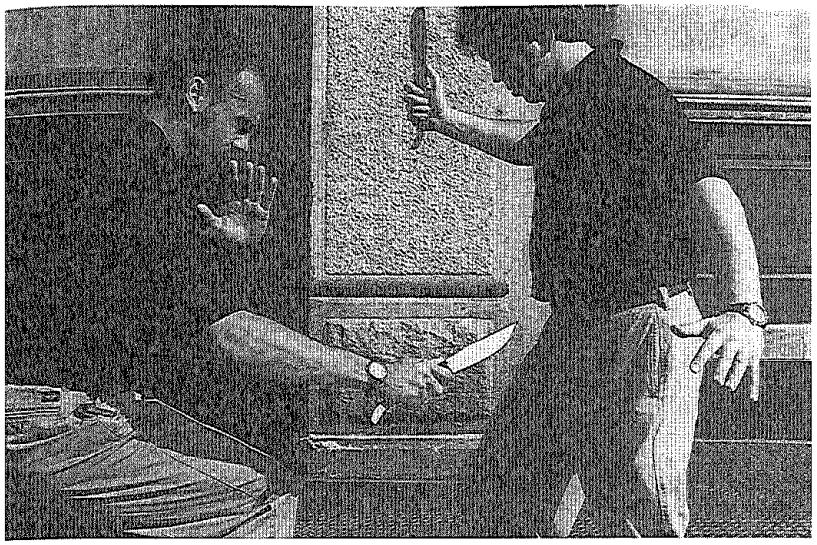
PUÑALADA

The puñalada (poon-ya-LAH-dah) is executed by lowering the point of the knife while extending the arm. It is important that the navaja's blade face to the left, with the plane of the blade parallel to the ground. The shoulder must be loose and relaxed throughout the movement. This type of thrust can be used either as a primary means of attack, or as a counterattack delivered immediately following a parrying tajo.

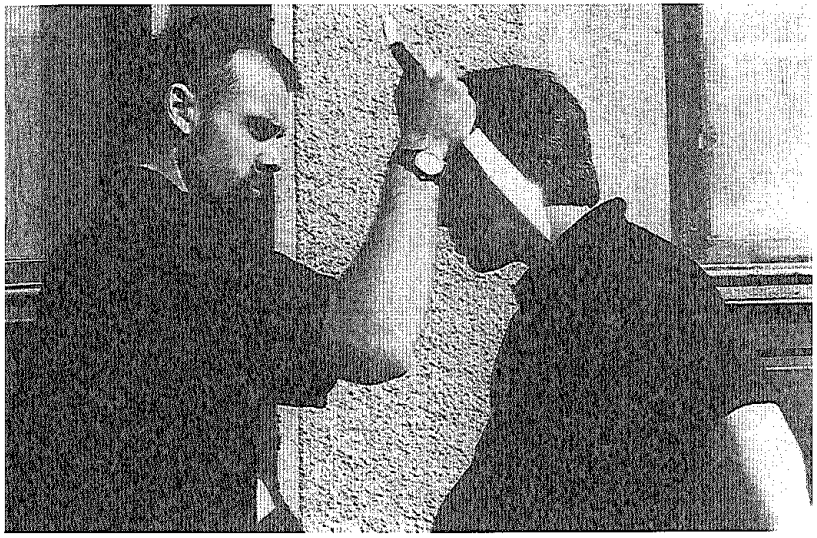
Types of Puñaladas

Puñaladas are categorized by the part of the opponent's body that is attacked, as well as by whether or not the outcome is successful. The following is a listing and description of the more commonly used puñaladas found in the art of the Sevillian Steel:

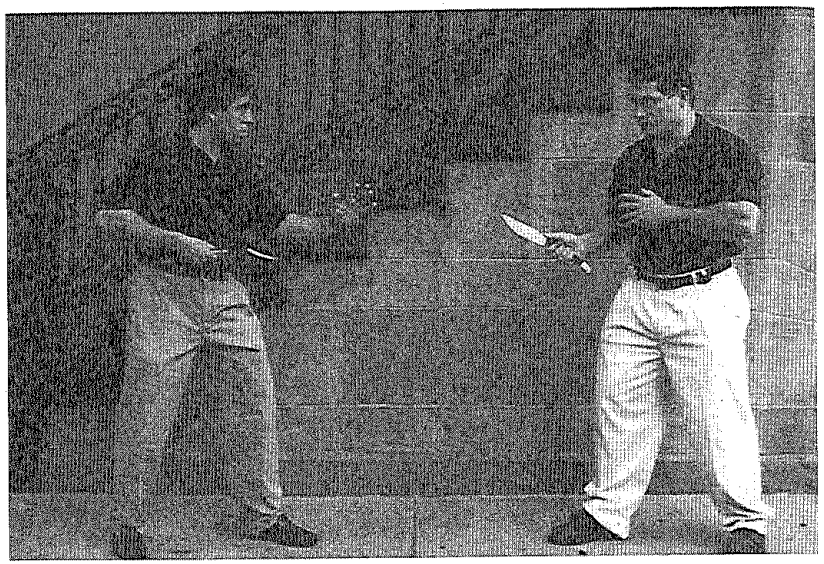
- A *viaje* (vee-AH-heh) is a thrust directed to the abdominal region.
- A *mojada* (mo-HA-dah) is a valid or successful thrusting attack (as opposed to an attack that it merely attempted or unsuccessful).
- A *desjarretazo* (des-ha-reh-TAH-soh) is a unique reverse thrust with the navaja held in what is often called the icepick grip. This thrust is almost exclusively directed against targets at the rear of the opponent's anatomy.
- A *floretazo* (flo-reh-TAH-so) is a counterthrust delivered to the opponent's upper body, executed at the same time

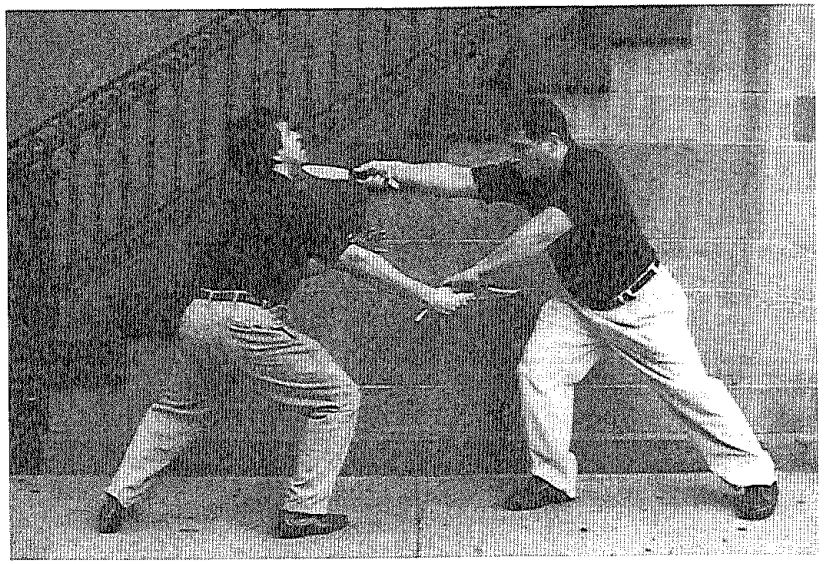


A viaje to the abdomen.



A desjarretazo to the subclavian artery.



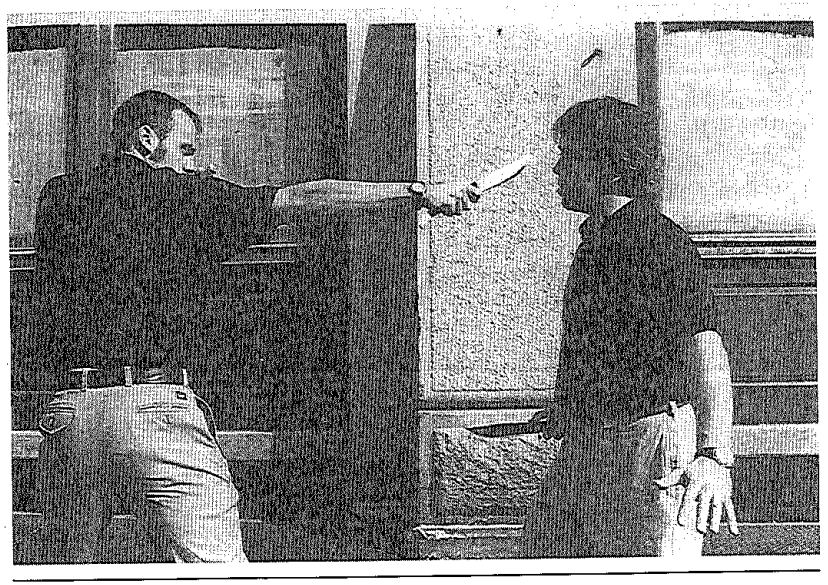


As the opponent (left) attempts a lunge, the navajero counters with a floretazo to the throat.

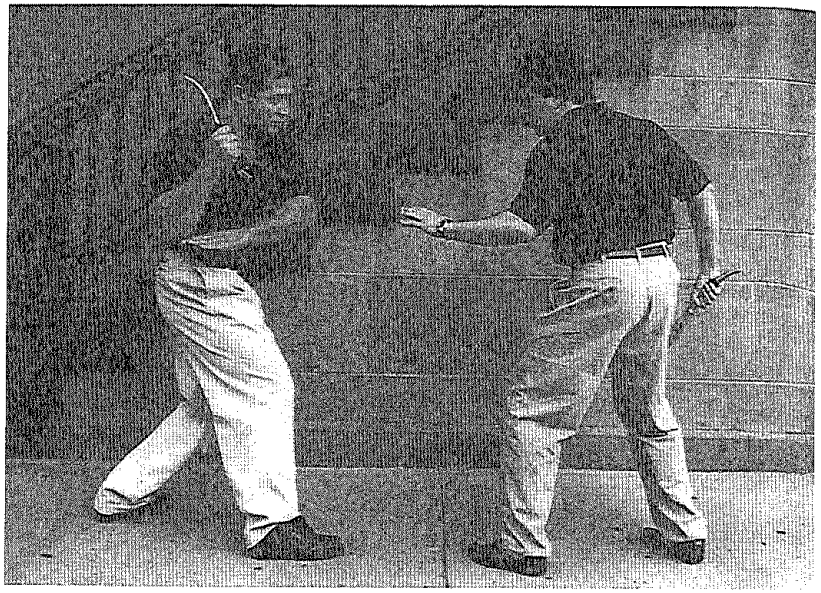
he initiates his attack. The concept of a simultaneous counterthrust is one that is common to many styles of bladed combat. In traditional fencing this is called a stop-hit; in Japanese swordsmanship it is known as an *ai-uchi*.

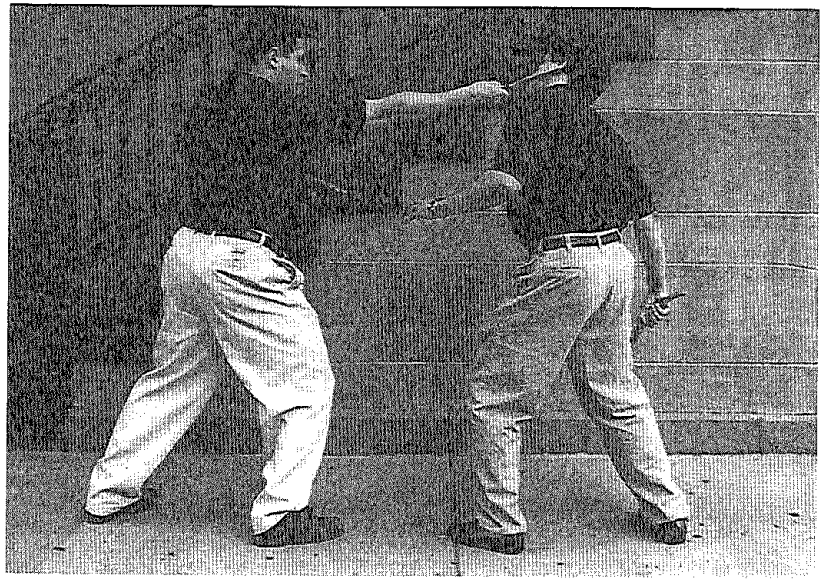
TAJO

The tajo (TAH-ho) with the navaja is performed by extending the blade and hand to the intended (or available) target in a short, swiping manner. At the moment the blade contacts the target, the tajo is completed by dipping the wrist and thumb, giving the attack a crisp snap. Recovering to the initial combat crouch completes the basic action of this attack. This slash is also used as the basic defensive movement of the navaja, designed to intercept an opponent's attack and damage his weapon arm.

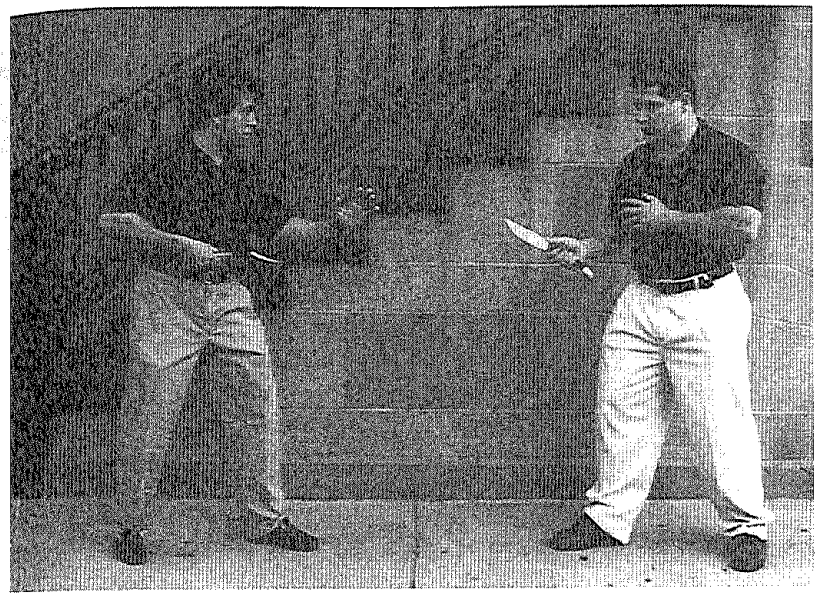


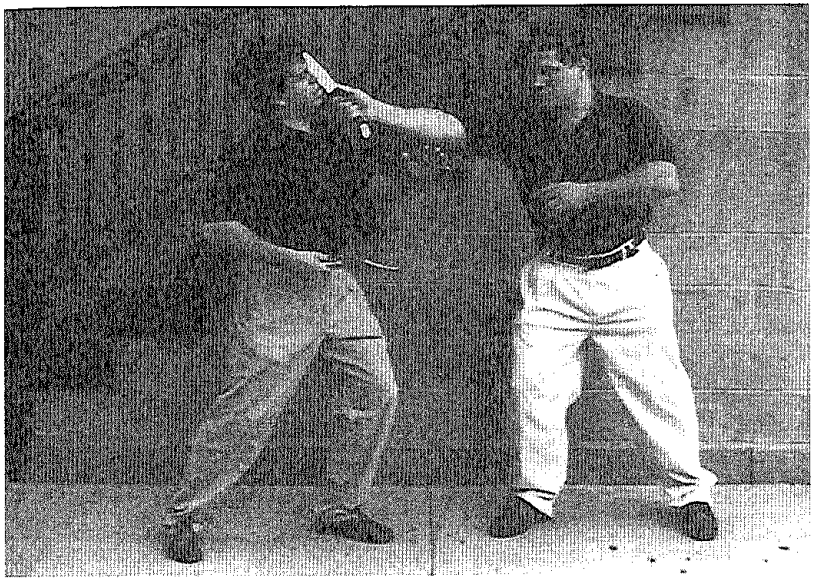
A reves to the face.





From a high chamber, the navajero delivers an arrebato to the side of the neck.





From a guard position, the navajero delivers a jabeque to the face.

Types of Tajos

Tajos, like puñaladas, are categorized by the area on the opponent's body that is attacked, as well as by the trajectory of the attack. In general, tajos are executed by deftly extending and sweeping the knife forward while lithely stepping in with the lead leg. The following is a listing and description of the more common tajos used in the art of Sevillian Steel:

- A *plumada* (ploo-MAH-dah) is a horizontal slash, whether directed across the face or midsection.
- A *reves* (re-VEHS), predictably, is a reverse slash. As with the plumada, it can be directed across the face or the midsection.
- A *mediotajo* (meh-dee-oh-TAH-hoh) is a short-arc slash, powered only by the elbow.
- An *arrebato* (ah-reh-BAH-toh) refers to a full arm slash, powered by the shoulder.
- A *jabeque* (ha-BEH-keh), also known as a *chirlo*, is a successful slash to the face.

Understandably, the jabeque is the attack most dreaded by the navajero. It not only visibly marks the recipient of the attack for life, but it also speaks poorly of his ability to perceive and intercept an attack that is considered to be unskilled and obvious.

CHAPTER 9

Defensive Movements with the Navaja

Art in execution. Fools always rush in, for all fools are rash . . . But the wise enter with great care; their bodyguards are watchfulness and caution. These scout out the hidden so that progress may be made without danger. Go slowly where the shoals are many. Let foresight feel the way, and let caution determine the ground.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

I had heard comments around the school that the maestro's daughter was herself an accomplished navajera[1] but, owing to a busy tourist season, Magdalena was rarely to be seen participating in a training session. My only notice of her handling navajas was while she tended the shop and showed the tourists how to open and close the knives they were buying. Her knife manipulations then seemed dexterous but uncomplicated. Initially I suspected that the skill attributed to her was merely the

same condescending male deference extended toward female practitioners in training halls throughout the world.

I stopped doubting when I overheard Dante, Santiago's senior Gypsy student, paying her a private compliment. Then, on a day when Santiago had to travel north to Toledo to receive a new shipment of merchandise, Magdalena took over his teaching duties, and I had the opportunity—and experience—of seeing the maestro's daughter in action. The subject of her lesson was defensive movements with the navaja.

"When you find it difficult to read an opponent," she began, "or when you know for certain that he possesses superior skill, it is advisable to adopt a defensive attitude. To assume an overconfident or aggressive attitude toward an unreadable or better-skilled opponent is to court danger for, as Gracián wrote, 'he hazards defeat who plays with cards exposed.'

"If, for example, I were to face Mr. Loriega, whom I have never engaged but I understand is a ninjutsu instructor, I would be foolish to launch into an offensive strategy." With a wave of her navaja, she beckoned me forward from the wall I was leaning on.

As I assumed the combat crouch, she mirrored me and kept on lecturing. "You must wait and observe. You must not be the sound, but the echo. You must not be substance, but shadow. Only through this strategy will you not be the impulsive loser, but the wary winner." Knowing from experience that an excellent time to initiate a preemptive attack is when the opponent is preoccupied with talking, I lunged forward with a deep thrust as Magdalena began her next sentence.

"For example," she was saying as I leapt toward her, "when the superior opponent attacks overconfidently"—her left foot swept behind her right—"simply extend your counterthrust toward his midsection or throat"—her right arm extended—"and he will impale himself." Pooof! Her outstretched navaja's counterthrust caught me squarely in the solar plexus. I had just provided Dante with yet another reason for complimenting the maestro's daughter.

THE THREE COUNTERTHRUSTS

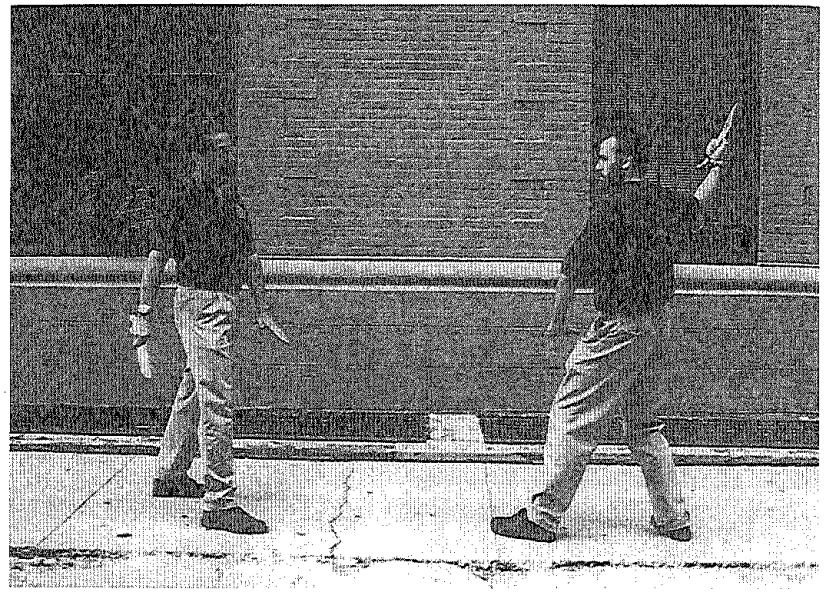
There are three principal types of counterthrusts used in the art of the navajero, each requiring a well-developed sense of timing for successful execution. Without this keen sense of timing, counterthrusts are better left unattempted. The three counterthrusts are as follows:

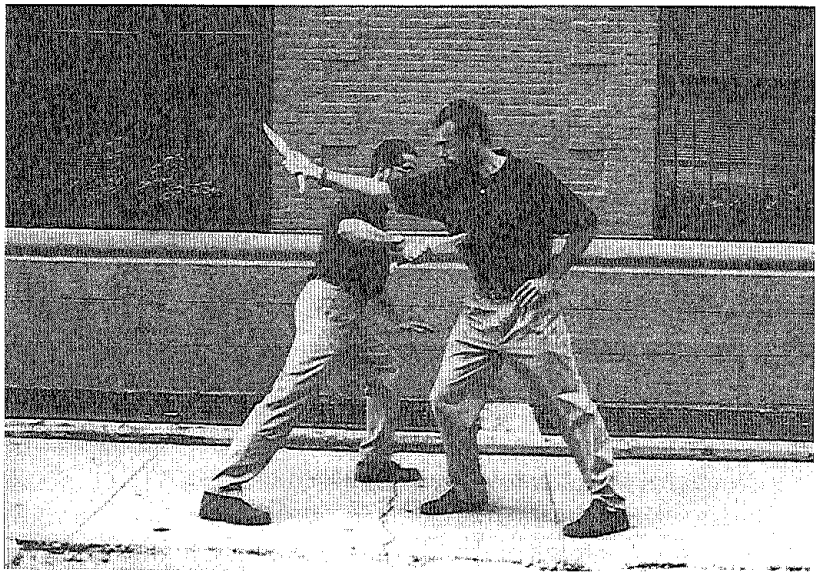
- the *estocada*
- the *cuadrada*
- the *pasada baja*

While it is evident that all three counterthrust techniques have been adapted by navajeros from traditional fencing,[2] they are as practical and effective today with the navaja as they originally were with a rapier. What the three techniques have in common is that they are not initial moves themselves, but responses to the opponent's own initial thrust. The effectiveness of all three counterthrust techniques relies heavily upon the navaja wielder's ability to simultaneously evade and counter in one swift and smooth action. This ability, like all others, is born of practice and repetition to the point of boredom. After boredom comes familiarity, and after familiarity, unconscious competence. The navajero, like every trained combatant, will always strive for unconscious competence.

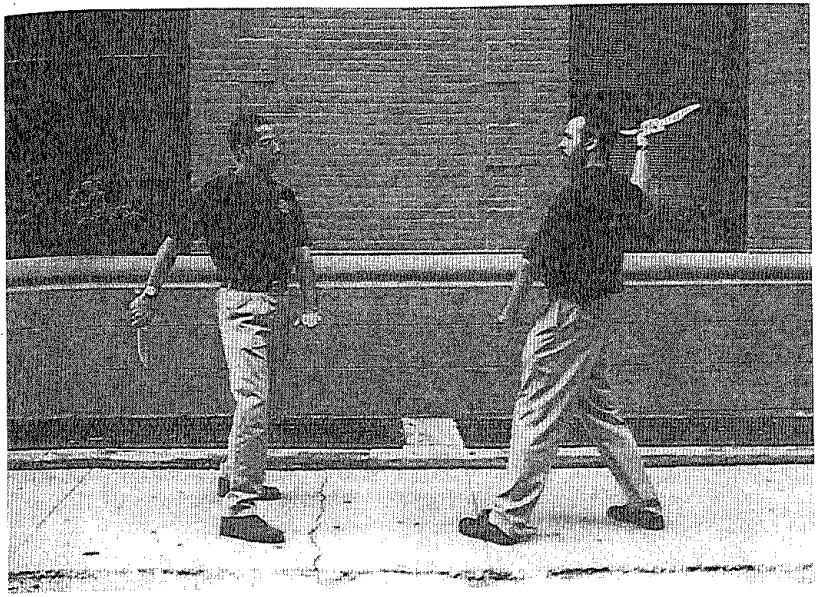
The Estocada

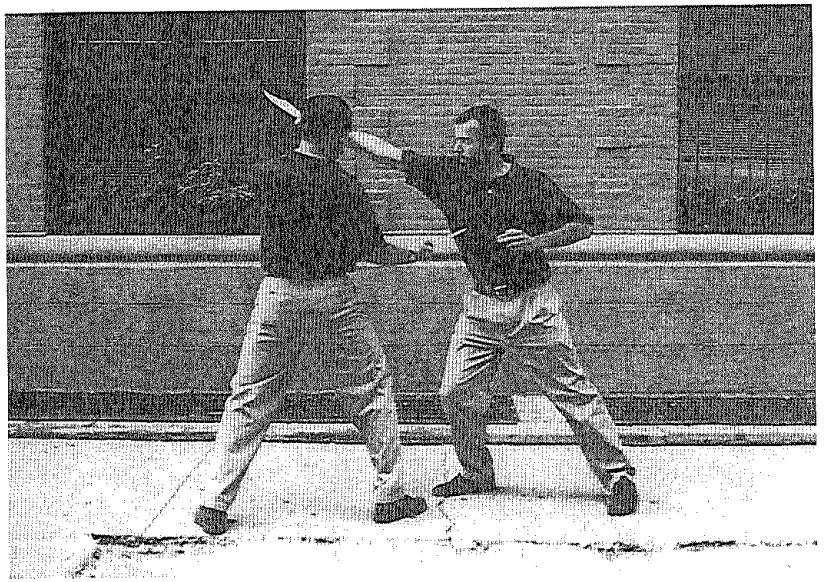
Begin to execute the estocada[3] from the standard combat crouch. As the attacker initiates and commits to his thrust, the navaja fighter steps forward to his left oblique with the left leg, while thrusting the navaja forward. This counterthrust should be kept low, and the primary target should be the attacker's exposed right rib cage. Alternate targets can be the throat or the right side of his face and neck. Use the ball of your right foot as a pivot point. Recover quickly from your counter and reorient yourself to his position.





The sequence of the estocada. As the opponent chambers for a face cut, step forward to the left and deliver a thrust to the right rib cage.





The sequence of the cuadrada. As the opponent chambers for a face thrust, sweep your left leg behind your right and deliver a thrust to the right rib cage.

The Cuadrada

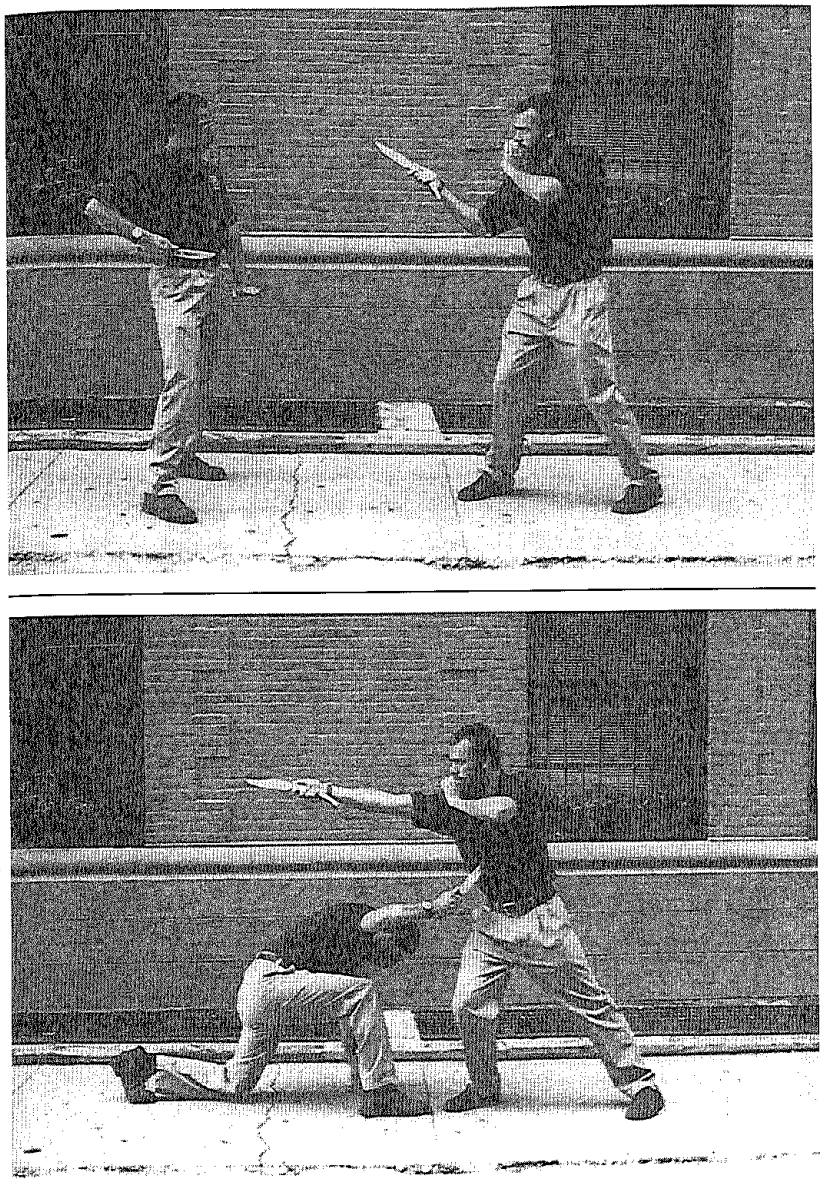
As with the estocada, begin to execute the cuadrada from the standard combat crouch position. As the attacker initiates and commits to his thrust, bring your rear left leg sweeping around behind your lead right leg. As you do this, simultaneously thrust the navaja forward. This counterthrust should be aimed high, and your primary target should be his throat. Alternate targets can be the midsection or right rib cage. Again, use the ball of your right foot as a pivot point. Recover quickly from your counter and reorient yourself to his position.

The Pasada Baja

To execute the pasada baja, begin again from the standard combat crouch position. This time, as the attacker initiates and commits to his thrust, slide your right leg forward and drop your left knee to an almost kneeling position. (Be careful, however, not to let the knee hit the ground.) As you drop your left knee down low, bring your left hand forward to the ground to brace yourself, simultaneously thrusting the navaja forward. Drop your head as you drop your arm and avoid the impulse to look at his knife. Your thrust should be aimed high, relatively speaking, and your primary target should be his abdomen or groin. Alternate targets can be the right thigh or stomach. As always, recover quickly from your counter and reorient yourself to his position.

Of the three counterthrusts described above, the estocada is considered the strongest with which to respond and the cuadrada the quickest to execute. The pasada baja is considered the most difficult to master since we have an innate and understandable fear of bringing our face and head that close to an oncoming knife. Use the pasada baja only against attacks to your chest or higher and remember that it is an excellent surprise tactic, but only if you use it against the proper attack at the proper moment.

A few evenings after my engagement with Magdalena, Santiago returned from Toledo and finished his daughter's lesson on defensive movements, reinforcing the importance of maintaining a reserved strategy against an unknown adversary.



The sequence of the pasada baja. As the oppenent chambers for a thrust to the throat, drop down on the left knee and deliver a thrust to the abdomen.

"Often," he explained, "because of their preoccupation with drawing first blood, novice navajeros tend to become overeager, frequently sacrificing technique, judgment, and their own safety." Emphatically, he warned, "Never forget that the art of the navajero is not the same as the art of fencing."

"The novice must remember that true knife combat is no sport and that with each instance of blade contact his very life is at stake," he continued. "Showing caution at the opening of combat is always wise. The proper distance must be maintained as the opponent is probed and assessed in order to identify—and take advantage of—any weakness in skill he may inadvertently display."

1 Female navaja expert.
2 Better known by their Italian terms, *stoccata, in-quartata*, and *pasata soto*.
3 The English word "stuck" is believed to be derived from either or both the Spanish "estocada"or the Italian "*stoccata,*" which connotes in both languages a thrust that impales.

CHAPTER 10

Finding Flesh

Cualquier lugar que suelte sangre es un lugar que se puede cortar . . . Any part of the body that bleeds is a part of the body that may be attacked. Ten small cuts are the same as one deep one. And remember: an opponent who does not bleed must be fled from like the devil, for that is in fact who he must be.

Don Santiago Rivera
Instructional Lecture, 7/14/96

In the sport of fencing, the targets that are considered valid are determined by the weapon with which one is fencing. In foil fencing, for example, only the area of the trunk constitutes a valid target. For epee and saber fencing, however, the head and arms as well as the trunk are valid targets. In the art of Sevillian Steel, the rules are much simpler: anything that bleeds is a valid target. This is of course because the art of Sevillian Steel is not a sport.

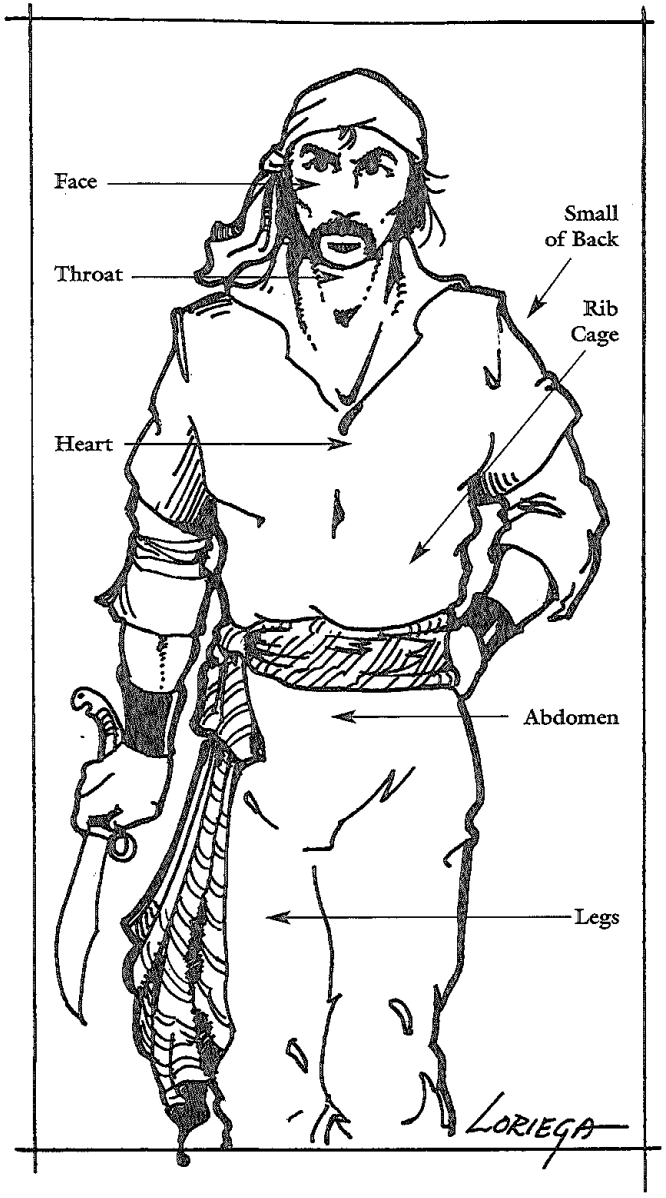
The ancient baratero's crude term for skill in attacking an

opponent's anatomy was *hallando carne*, which literally, if coarsely, translates into "finding flesh." (Predictably, today this term can hold a totally different meaning for hormone-ridden youths who cruise Seville at night, hoping to run into a less lethal type of Sevillana.) The *Manual del Baratero* proposes that flesh can be "found" in either of two very general sections of the body: *parte alta*, or *parte baja*. Essentially, these are the high areas, which include the upper body from the forehead to the waist, and the low areas, which are composed of the body from the waist to the feet. While anything that bleeds is still considered a valid find, there are nonetheless preferred targets for which one should aim when one's life depends on it. In order of importance, these preferred targets are as follows:

- abdomen
- heart
- rib cage
- small of the back
- face
- throat
- legs

As discussed in a previous chapter, among navajeros, attacks to specific targets are known by specific names. A thrust to the abdomen, for instance, is called a viaje. A slash to the face is called a jabeque. A stab to the small of the back, between the scapulae, is

The desjarretazo as illustrated by Gustave Doré.



Some preferred targets of the baratero.

known as desjarretazo, and so forth. Thus, the navajero must not only be adequately knowledgeable of where to attack, but must also be properly skilled in how to attack.

Apart from the seven preferred targets listed, any and all targets of opportunity are eligible for attack. The closer to the torso, the more significant the targets in terms of potential damage done. Because every target presents a viable opportunity to dissuade, disarm, or destroy the attacker, it is essential that the navajero be able to thrust in any direction and cut an attack from any trajectory.

THE SECRET HAND OF SAINT ELOY

Don Santiago Rivera's Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas represents one of the two traditional approaches that a person could take to acquire the life-and-death skills of the Spanish art of the navajero. The other approach, the option for those not connected or cultured enough to train at a respectable school, was to pursue membership in one of the loosely organized knife fraternities that once abounded throughout the Mediterranean. These are the same type of secret fraternities from which the Maquis evolved in Corsica and the Cosa Nostra arose in Sicily.

In the absence of a centralized and accountable system of law and justice, the people of the Mediterranean instinctively formed grassroots brotherhoods to further the basic common needs of their towns. Whether these societies developed into freedom fighters, as did the Maquis, or into organized crime syndicates, such as the Cosa Nostra, was determined regionally by the needs, goals, and whims of the particular society's members and leaders.

In Spain's past, an option available to villagers

and townsmen concerned with their safety or the safety of their families was to join secret fraternities that were aptly called manos, which is Spanish for hands. These quasi-political groups united their efforts for the well-being of their town and its residents. As such, the mano did whatever was necessary to aid its members—from helping to build a house to arranging a marriage, seeing to it that a widow was provided for or even righting a wrong permitted by an unresponsive legal system.

When personal safety and security were the concerns of its members, developing self-protection skills became an obvious function of the manos. Often, members would visit the houses where these secret manos convened—typically in remote farmhouses or areas on the outskirts of the town—and learn to defend themselves using the basic weapons of the Spanish townsman: the shotgun (escopeta) *and the knife (navaja). The effective use of the shotgun required little training; the knife, on the other hand, demanded continuous practice for personal mastery.*

Santo Eloy, the patron saint of navajeros.

It was rumored that Don Santiago belonged to such a fraternity, known as La Mano de Santo Eloy. Santo Eloy, known in English as Saint Eligius, is the patron saint of metallurgists, cutlers, and knife handlers. If a secret society was to be formed around the use of knives, then Santo Eloy was the perfect patron saint for whom to name it. I discov-

ered that practically nothing exists in print concerning the manos, and my attempts to gather insight concerning this particular mano proved predictably futile. Information about this fraternity was either scarce or extremely well guarded. Magdalena herself claimed never to have heard of it. Only Don Santiago could potentially shed light on La Mano de Santo Eloy. This, however, was something which he never confirmed or acknowledged and which no one had the right to ask directly.

CHAPTER 11

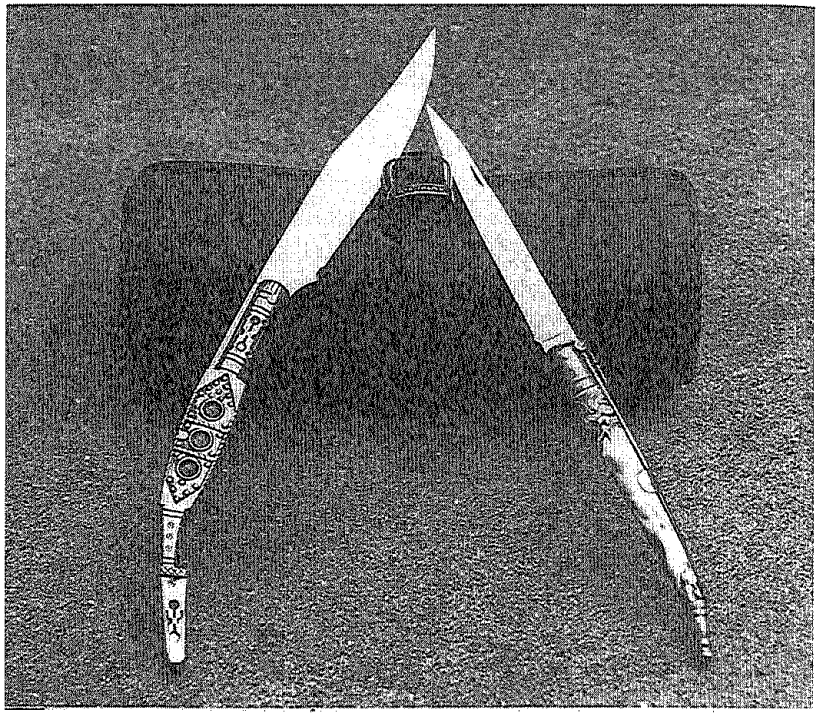
The Woman's Navaja

The rapidity with which their fans open and close beneath their fingers, the flash of their eye, the assurance of their movements, the willowy lissomness of their figures, add a characteristic touch to their appearance. There may be women in England, France, and Italy whose beauty is of a more perfect and regular type, but there are certainly none prettier and more piquant.

Theophile Gautier
Voyage En Espagne

THE WOMAN'S TECHNIQUE

The week following Magdalena's lesson on counterthrusts, I visited her shop to see the new shipment of navajas Santiago had brought back from Toledo. Magdalena made an effort to apologize for using me as the "victim" of her lesson. I told her that in the past it had been my sincere honor to learn at the receiving end of many



Two examples of the basic salvavirgo.

other masters of the combat arts. In Seville, I told her, I was happy to learn not only from Don Santiago Rivera, but from his highly skilled daughter as well. She smiled but shook her head slowly to indicate that I had missed her point.

"My little skill at the art of thrust and counterthrust comes as a result of my being a Sevillian woman," she said pertly, "not because I am my father's daughter. The navaja is the knife of the common folk; that means of women as well as of men. In spite of traditional Spanish machismo, or perhaps because of it, women have been encouraged to carry navajas since the time of Queen Isabella. In fact, the phrase *'la navaja en la liga'* is a well-known one, frequently encountered in our country's literature. It means 'the knife in the garter' and refers to the woman's primary means

of self-protection in centuries past. In Sevilla, when a woman picks up the navaja, her skill comes not from training but from passion." My raised eyebrow prompted her to continue.

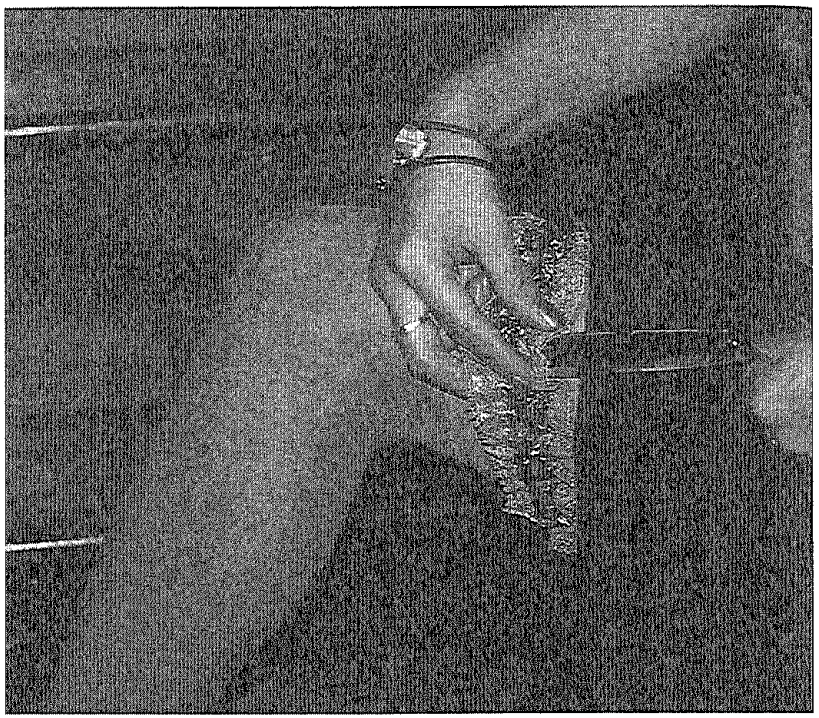
"To the world," she explained, "Spain is the nation of passion. To Spain, Andalusia is the heart of that passion. Our music, the bolero, is passionate. Our dance, the flamenco, is full of passion. And our sport, bullfighting, is consummated when blood is spilled in the sand. We love passionately, and we fight passionately. Even when a woman is approached with unwelcome advances, she defends herself against the person accosting her with terrible passion. And she succeeds when her actions come from the heart."

This, once more, turned out to be one of Magdalena's literal explanations. I initially took her "from the heart" statement to mean that an attacked woman's response must be purposeful and intentional. While this was certainly part of what she was saying, the maestro's daughter was also making a technical point. As the sevillano style proposes it, the most expedient way in which a woman can effectively defend herself against unwanted physical advances is to hold the navaja in a reverse grip and chamber it in front of her heart. From this ready position even an untrained woman can repel the majority of an assailant's attempts to paw, grab, or even disarm her.

THE SALVAVIRGO

The navaja used by women to defend themselves is called a salvavirgo. In centuries past, when it was carried tucked into a garter on the right leg, the knife remained out of sight as long as a woman's skirt was in place. If her skirt were lifted for any reason, or by any person not of her choosing, it would only be raised as far as was necessary for the accosted woman to reach her salvavirgo. At that point, the knife was likely to dispatch her assailant well before he might begin to dishonor her.

By coincidence, it was a shipment of salvavirgos that Santiago had taken receipt of in Toledo. Magdalena took out a



The knife in the garter.

roll of burgundy velvet from behind a counter and delicately unwrapped it. In it were a dozen beautifully crafted women's knives. Just as there are significant differences in the reasons why knives are carried by men and women, so are there differences in their designs. The decorativeness found on the salvavirgo is noticeably more pronounced than that found on the typical navaja. Some had black pearl scales; others abalone; the most impressive one had three small emeralds inlaid into each of its shiny brass handles.

Inscriptions etched onto the blades' surfaces eloquently revealed who and what the salvavirgos were intended for. The blades of some knives read *Defiendo A Una Dama* (I Defend A Lady); others were inscribed with *Que Viva Mi Dueña* (Long Live

A Gypsy woman's salvavirgo.

My Mistress). Traditionally, the main difference in the rationale behind carrying a knife was that men carried navajas to defend their honor; women carried salvavirgos to protect their virtue.

"That of course," said Magdalena in her characteristic off-hand manner, "is where the woman's navaja derives its name!"

When the lost expression on my face made it clear to her that she would have to explain the name to me, an embarrassed look replaced the smugness on her face. "'Virgos' is a vulgar term for virginity used by the lower classes. A 'salvavirgo' then was a young woman's virginity-saver."

I commented politely that the function of the salvavirgo seemed like a reverse approach to the concept of a chastity belt, one that gave the initiative to the woman instead of to the man.

A salvavirgo on a ring.

"Yes, the intent is similar," smiled Magdalena, demurely "except in the matter of who it is that ultimately gets penetrated."

CHAPTER 12

La Navaja Compañera

Possess yourself of the necessities of life twice over. It is to insure doubly your existence, for you may not depend solely upon, or be limited to, any one thing, however extraordinary it may be; everything should be had twice over, and especially the means of life, good will, and satisfaction.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

One evening as I entered the Escuela Sevillana, Don Santiago approached me with excited curiosity. "Magdalena has told me that you purchased a new sevillana that you feel very comfortable with. Is this true? Let me see it."

"Yes," I responded, reaching deep into my jacket's right pocket to pull out a small store bag. From the bag I extracted the sevillana, which was still wrapped and taped in souvenir paper. In Spain, ceramics, cutlery, and similar "handicrafts" are always

thoroughly wrapped by their merchants, who automatically assume that such items are traveling back with the purchaser to his place of origin. As I carefully removed the tape and unwrapped the sevillana, however, the anxious Santiago made a comment in jest that may also have been half in earnest: "If you really needed to use it, the ambulance would be arriving by the time you got it out."

I became somewhat irritated by the comment but was not certain whether to make an issue of it or not. Instead, I deftly slipped my left hand beneath my right armpit and slid out the custom-designed aikuchi[1] I always travel with. With a smugness that disguised my anger at his casual slight, I responded: "It would be arriving for the other guy then!"

Santiago smiled broadly, perhaps sensing my upset at his insinuation that I was inexperienced in quickly drawing my weapon. He slapped me heavily on the shoulder and said, "Very good. Very, very good!"

A MERCIFUL AND ALTRUISTIC MAN

Later Magdalena, who had expressed embarrassment at her father's tactless comment, explained that instant readiness and response time were pet concerns of his. (I assured her I had taken his comment only as an expression of this concern.) Owing to said concern with readiness and response, it was rumored that Santiago routinely carried four or five navajas on his person. (Although it would have been a breach of trust to ask the maestro how well and where he was armed, I gained a certain insight into this from observation as well as from his lectures.) On a later occasion Magdalena revealed to me that her father armed himself with many navajas because he was a merciful and altruistic man. When I smiled at what I took to be sarcasm, she made it clear she was not joking.

"My father does not carry many navajas to win an encounter; he carries them to avoid one." Seeing that I remained skeptical, Magdalena continued. "As you know, here in Sevilla we prepare

all year for the celebration of Semana Santa (Holy Week). It is a time of solemn piety colorfully mixed with medieval pomp and pagan revelry. Every community has its processions, the biggest and most lavish ones taking place here in Sevilla. One year, when I was 15, a young man from Córdoba became inebriated and persisted in bothering me, asking me to dance. I kept politely refusing him, but he kept drinking and kept insisting. Eventually my father noticed.

Five Navajas, One Lesson

"He told the young man that my refusal to dance was not my fault; that I was simply abiding by his rule that I not dance with strangers. This was not true, of course, but he felt it would shift the young man's unwanted attention away from me. It did, but to the extent that the man became insolent with my father, saying that he had no right bringing me up in such an antiquated manner. The man said he was going to teach my father that these were modern times and that old people did not deserve either the blind obedience of their children or the automatic deference of the younger folk. Taking off his jacket, he announced that he was going to teach my father a lesson.

"My father said he would gladly oblige him. He then took out a small navaja from his right pants pocket, opened it, and placed it on a table. As the young man looked at the navaja, my father took a larger one from his left pants pocket and placed that one open on the table. He proceeded to take out three more navajas, each larger than the previous one, from their carrying places and set them open in front of the young man, who by now was becoming very sober very quickly.

" 'Let's go at it,' my father told him. 'Pick whichever one you like . . . any one except this one,' he said, picking up the smallest navaja of the five. 'This navajita is my favorite.'

" 'Old man,' said the Córdoban, 'you are lucky that it is Holy Week and it would be a sin for me to hurt you. In fact, I am leaving now to avoid the temptation. Thank the saints that I am a religious and God-fearing man.' So saying, the stranger ran

away, although we're not certain it was only God that he was fearing that night. In any case, it was the fact that my father had five navajas on his person that precluded the need for him to be the one to teach a lesson."

"I guess one could expect no less," I remarked, "from a merciful and altruistic man!"

CARRY MODES FOR THE NAVAJA

Richard Ford, the previously cited author of *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home*, noted in his book that "the navaja, which is an integral part of the Spaniard, is kept in the sash." Similarly, Baron Charles D'Avillier, in his colorful 1874 travelogue, *L'Espagne*, confirmed, "The navaja is a phenomenon that is uniquely Spanish: among the gentry there are but a few who do not carry this large and sharp knife either in their pocket, their sash, or tethered by a cord to the buttonhole of their jacket."

Today, speaking as eloquently as those travel writers of the 19th century, Santiago continuously reminds his navajeros that "the blade must be your constant companion." He emphasizes, "Like a good wife, she should be at your side in whatever you do, always providing assistance, support, and confidence. Treat her well, keep her sharp, and she will be faithful to you to the end."

The knife you carry for self-protection must be available and accessible for it to be of any use to you. You can be fairly certain that when an attacker approaches you, his own weapon, whether brandished or not, is ready for use. Such being the case, the reaction time available to you for bringing your own weapon into play is minimal at best. Most situations will not allow for you to fumble through your pockets to find and draw your weapon. You will either be ready, or you will be cut.

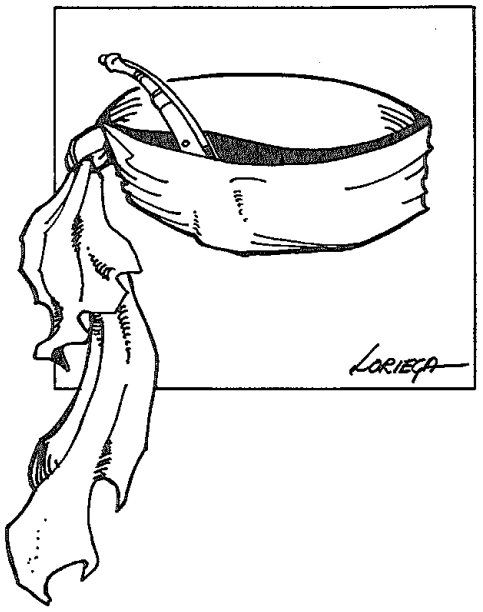
It is an unfortunate fact that many individuals who carry knives often feel self-satisfied simply because they do carry. But simply carrying a knife is not enough. Even carrying it regularly in the same place to find it easily is not enough. Only carrying it consistently, finding it quickly, and having it ready before the attacker reaches you is acceptable. And as it is, having it ready merely gives you a 50/50 chance of survival.

Multiple Companions

Santiago, like many others of his avocation, encourages the carrying of at least two knives at all times. This makes perfect sense. The navajero, after all, must be ambidextrous for he cannot afford to cease defending himself if his dominant hand becomes injured. It follows then that if both his hands are capable of effectively, if not equally, wielding a knife, he should fully avail himself of this potential. While this doesn't necessarily mean that he should fight with two knives simultaneously, it does mean that he should have knives within reach of each hand.

Traditional Carry Modes

In the 18th century, navajeros typically carried their navajas tucked into the sashes that were worn around their waists. The sash was folded width-wise and tied about the waist. The resulting fold became, in effect, a "pocket" that securely held the navaja, money, and anything else to which the wearer might want quick access. To facilitate this access, the closed navaja was inserted into the sash hinged end first, allowing the butt end of the handle to protrude from the sash.



The sash, folded width-wise, was tied about the waist.

In the 19th century, pant pockets became more common and replaced the sash as the navaja's preferred carrying location. Pockets allowed just as much access to the knife, but it now remained

fully out of sight, in keeping with the growing sensibilities of "decent society." (The reader will recall that it was in the mid-19th century when the *Manual del Baratero*, which disparaged Spain's "decent society," was published.)

Contemporary Carry Modes

In modern times, we have essentially the same carrying options as in centuries past. With regard to having knives within reach, most knife experts agree that the key to a good carrying position is one in which the weapon can be quickly and smoothly drawn without any wasted time or motion. It is vital to determine which are the best carrying locations for your knives and to familiarize yourself with drawing quickly and smoothly from these locations. Some of the most convenient locations in which to carry the navaja in a ready yet unobtrusive manner are as follows:

- the side pockets of your jacket
- the side pockets of your pants
- tucked into the waistband in a cross-draw position
- tucked into the waistband in a behind-the-hip position

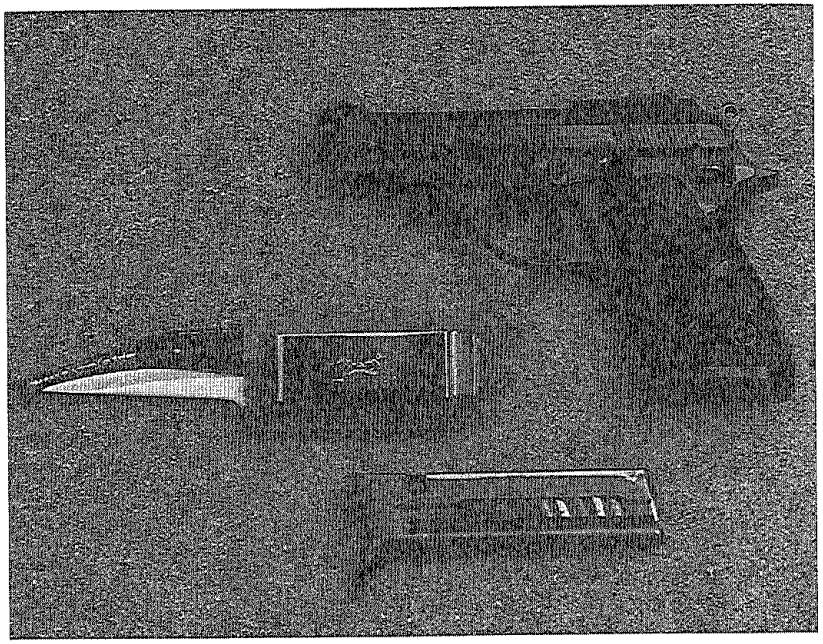
The female students at the school, apart from the above-listed options, have a unique manner of carrying their salvavirgos based on the centuries-old practice of keeping their knives in their garter belts. The women patronize a particular neighborhood seamstress who custom-tailors silken sheaths for their garters. The garter sheaths allow the women to carry their clasp-knives in the traditional manner: on the right thigh under their skirts. The sheath prevents the knife from constantly rubbing against the outside of the thigh, and the silk's texture enables the women to smoothly draw their "steel companions" at a moment's notice.

One carrying method used by Santiago is to insert a sevillana into a flapless .45 caliber magazine case and insert the case inside his waistband. (I found it interesting that this knife-carry method is practiced by a man whose ability with a navaja can be at least as lethal as a mag-

The navaja in the waistband.

azine's worth of bullets.) Adopting this idea, upon my return from Spain I visited a number of gun shows and fitted my navajas in the appropriate cases. I discovered that the simple suede Safariland cases worked best for my sevillanas. Using this carry method I have found that it is easy to hook the magazine case/navaja ensemble into the breast pocket of a blazer for a high left-handed cross-draw.

Because it is so critical to have the navaja ready before the attacker reaches you, Santiago had a simple tactic he recommended for whenever the odds of having



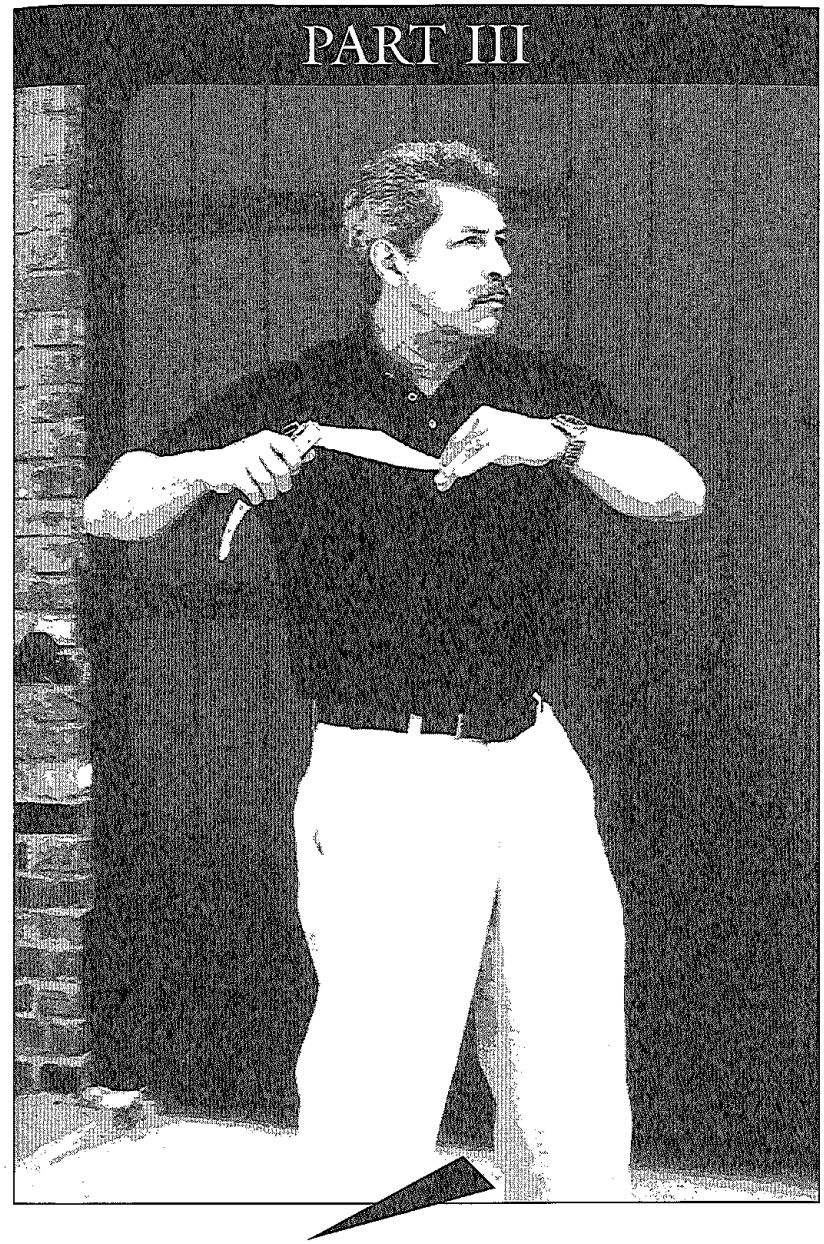
A suede magazine case makes an ideal navaja sheath.

to defend yourself were great. Prior to entering a danger zone, Santiago would inconspicuously draw his navaja, open it, and slip it between his belt and waistband over his right hip. In this manner, he does not need to first find and then open it before being able to defend himself. Placing it through his belt over the right hip allows him to draw the navaja with the right hand or, if necessary, the left hand in a cross-draw fashion. This preventive technique, of course, requires the wearing of a windbreaker or jacket to cover the exposed carry.

Remember, for a knife to be of use to you, it must be made your constant companion. And as with companions, there is safety in numbers. The keys to successfully carrying any knife are experimentation and practice. See what locations work best for you and then practice to make certain they work at all times and under all conditions.

1 A short Japanese tanto dagger especially suitable for thrusting and stabbing at close quarters.

PART III



Knifeless and Unarmed Defenses

CHAPTER 13

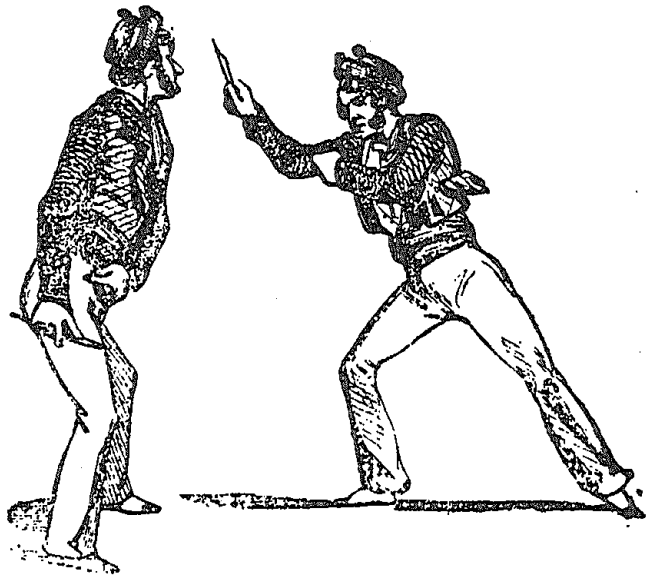
Sevillian Defense

In all matters keep something in reserve. It is to insure your position; not all your wit must be spent nor all your energies sapped every time; even of what you know keep a rear guard, for it is to double your advantage always to have in reserve something to call upon when danger threatens bad issue.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

Although M.d.R.'s *Manual del Baratero* presented the reader with a variety of "win-at-all-costs" tactics, the instruction it contained was merely an abbreviated record of the many resourceful methods already being taught in 19th-century Spain. While it was true that, as M.d.R. claimed, many fencing establishments were more concerned with teaching pompous posturing and fancy footwork to their highbrow members, other schools of edged weapons of the times maintained a sober per-

jereza de ojos ayuda á toda clase de suertes, que estando en guardia el diestro puede aprocsimarse al contrario hasta tocar en su terreno, y por lo tanto arriesgarse considerablemente á ser herido, siempre que se proponga no permitirle mover el brazo armado; pues al mas insignificante movimiento que hiciese podria herirle en el mismo brazo, obligándole de esta manera á permanecer sin atacar. Esta suerte es de mucho peligro, porque para los dos combatientes solo hay un *terreno* donde ambos pueden herirse sin movimiento alguno de pies, y con estirar el brazo de la navaja.



El diestro se puede colocar en *guardia* usando de cualquiera de las *suertes*, pero con la es-

Another illustration from the Manual del Baratero.

spective and realistic approach in terms of the blade-handling they practiced. These schools did not lend as much emphasis to protocol as they did to surviving an encounter. "It is better to be alive than to be proper," was their unofficial motto. To this end, the navajeros worked to become skilled in fighting with incidental weapons as well as with Sevillian Steel.

INCIDENTAL WEAPONS

The schools taught the navajero the numerous ways he could survive an encounter should he ever find himself without his navaja. In many of the old schools, as in Don Santiago's today, there was a separate, if unwritten, curriculum for both armed and unarmed fighting. We have mentioned that while the navaja is the primary focus of training, the sevillano style also incorporates instruction in a variety of gentlemen's arms. These include sword-canes, walking sticks, riding crops, and similar "respectable" accouterments of the 19th century. Incidental weapons include the chair, the scissors (evidently adapted from the gitano style), and the common jacket. Thus, before continuing on to how the navajero defends himself *a mano limpia*,[1] we will consider some of the non-navaja options he resorted to when circumstances required it.

The Chair (El Asiento)

In times past, when a man frequented a tavern, he kept his navaja within hand's reach. Aside from a darkened Spanish street, the tavern was the place he was most likely to need it. Alternately, he might slip his navaja from his pants pocket to his waistband, in front of his right hip. If he were visiting a tavern in an unfamiliar locale, the navaja was placed at the ready long before he reached the entrance.

In a tavern, however, the navaja would not be the prudent man's first line of defense. This was especially true if he'd had a few glasses of jerez. For one thing, his reflexes and balance might be impaired. For another, he did not want to seem quick to pull

out a navaja in front of others even if his opponent had his out and ready. Thus, when in a tavern, and at any place where he was engaged in drinking, a man's first line of defense was often a chair.

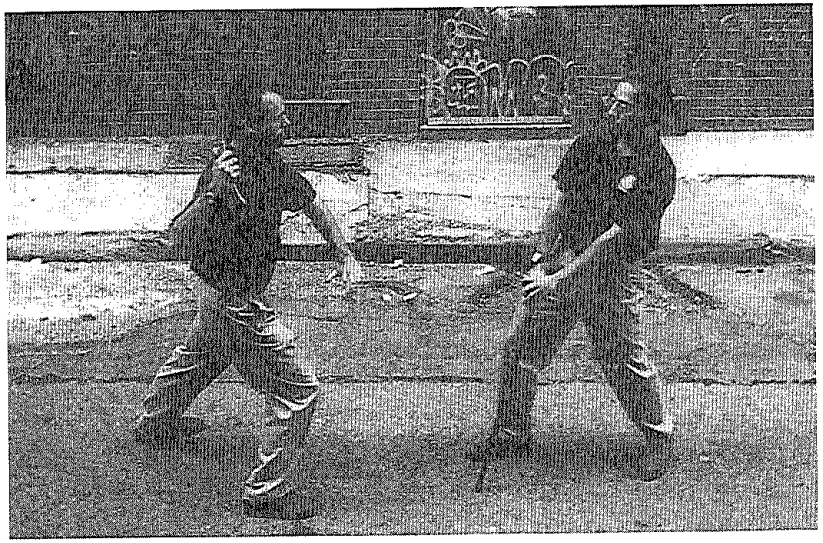
"In most social situations," advises Don Santiago, "if a knife is drawn, the first thing one should to do is to slam the attacker with a chair." He emphasizes that "a person is fully justified in doing whatever is warranted against an instigator. And, at the early threatening stage of an [armed] encounter, the safest and surest move is to put the man down quickly and decisively. The chair accomplishes this perfectly."

In many traditional escuelas de armas blancas and salle d'armes of the 19th century, the tactical use of a chair as a defense against a sword or knife attack was a standard component of the training. Chairs, it was reasoned, were generally available in all urban environments. The chair's length allowed a sufficient distance between the defender's body and the attacker's weapon, while at the same time potentially becoming a weapon in its own right. Even many of the classic knife-fighting manuals published in this century, such as Capt. William E. Fairbairn's *Get Tough*, illustrate the use of the chair for this purpose.

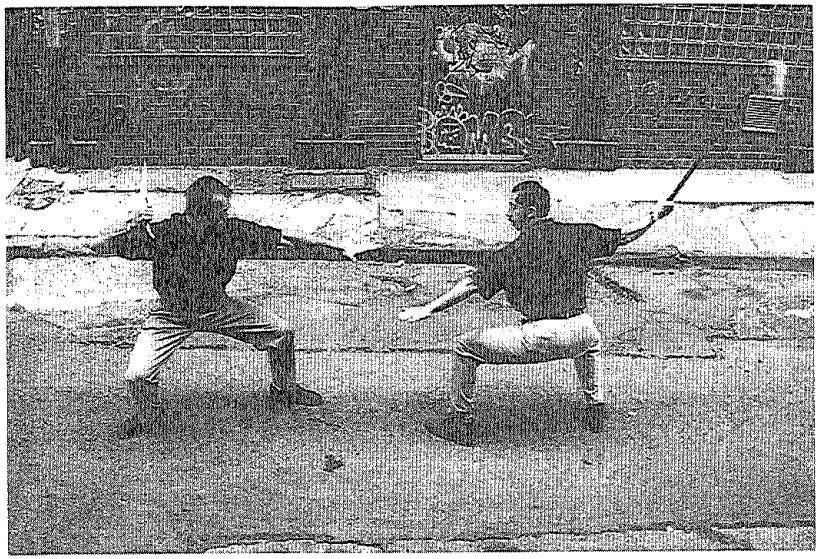
"The main point to remember when using the chair against a bladed weapon," warns Don Santiago, "is to keep it constantly in motion. Jab the chair's legs at the weapon or at the attacker, or swing it at his arm or head. Resist the urge to throw it, and do not under any circumstances just hold it still between you and the opponent." If you do, he can easily grab the legs' crossbar and drag you around that way. Instead of assuming a defensive attitude, adopt an offensive mind-set and press him until you eventually finish him off.

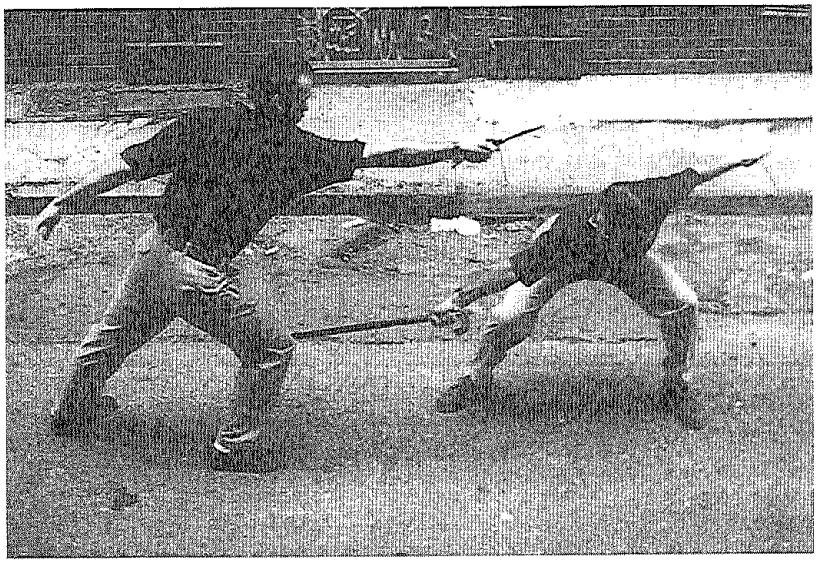
The Walking Stick (El Bastón)

Another popular item to which a man had recourse, especially one who was a member of the middle classes, was the venerable bastón, or walking stick, which was a common accoutrement in past centuries. Among Spaniards, the most skilled wielders of canes and walking sticks for combative purposes are



Defending oneself with the walking stick. As the opponent opens his knife and chambers it, grip the cane by the middle with the left hand to intercept the slash. Then, chamber the cane and strike the opponent across his lead knee.





indisputably the Basques, who inhabit the area of the Pyrenees between France and Spain but claim allegiance to neither country. The Basque's aptitude with this incidental weapon becomes deadly when the walking stick he uses for fighting is a *makhila*—a wicked walking stick used with equal skill to prod cattle or settle arguments.

The makhila's wooden shaft is crafted while the stick is still a branch, with the maker scarring it in the linear or serpentine pattern of his choice. The top of the walking stick has a heavy metal pommel the size and shape of a small doorknob, making it a formidable bludgeoning weapon. Beneath the metal pommel, the walking stick's shaft is wrapped with leather for a span of 10 to 12 inches. Pulling up on the pommel-and-leather ensemble reveals a needle-like blade, converting the remainder of the walking stick's shaft into a short but lethal spear.

While Andalusians do not number the Basques' makhilas among their defensive options, they can nonetheless swing a simple bastón with telling results. They may use a one-handed or two-handed grip, depending on the proximity of the opponent and the amount of force they want behind their strike. The outcome of an encounter between an opponent armed with a navaja and one wielding a walking stick will be wholly determined by the skill levels of the two antagonists.

It is not possible to review here the specifics of the various incidental weapons available to navajeros—table cloths, hats, belts, riding crops, and so forth. Nor do space limitations allow for a thorough exploration of the many other actual weapons practiced and used in Don Santiago's school. Two items, however, deserve more than a passing mention. Thus, cursory treatments follow in the next two chapters on the school's handling of the Gypsy's scissors and the common jacket.

1 Literally, with a clean hand, i.e., unarmed.

CHAPTER 14

Scissors versus Blade

Los jitanos son los unicos que manejan esta clase de arma . . . The gypsies are the only ones who handle this type of weapon [scissors], undoubtedly because they generally dedicate themselves to the grooming of horses and so carry them to shear the manes of mules . . ."

M.d.R.
Manual del Baratero

SCISSORS TECHNIQUES

In past centuries, the use of a pair of scissors in combat was an exclusive specialty of the Andalusian Gypsy. Carried in a leather sheath and worn at the waist like a sailor's knife, the scissors were ever-present in an innocuous manner. However, the moment the Gypsy felt threatened, the scissors magically appeared in his light-fingered hands.

Holding the Scissors

According to Dante, Santiago's

senior Gypsy student, the most common way to hold scissors is like a knife in a forward grip, with the ring and little fingers inserted through the scissors' bottommost finger hole. This enables one to deliver hard puñulada-type thrusts without losing one's grip on impact. The forward grip also affords the greatest reach with the scissors, a benefit necessary if the opponent is armed with a navaja or some other form of edged weapon.

Another way in which the gitano practitioner holds the scissors is in a reverse grip, with either his thumb or index finger inserted through the finger holes. This grip gives him stronger control over the scissors and is the preferred way of holding them when his opponent's weapon is not an edged one. The gitano will gladly take a blow from a stick or wine bottle in return for the opportunity to grab the opponent and repeatedly stab him at close quarters using the technique of the desjarretazo. (The desjarretazo, it will be recalled, is a rather unique thrust performed at very close quarters with the navaja or scissors held in a reverse, or icepick, grip.) During a clinch, the gitano can reach over the opponent's shoulder or around the rib cage and powerfully drive the scissors into the small of the latter's back.

A third way in which the gitano holds his scissors for fighting is in the style of a push dagger. The thumb is placed between the scissors' open handles, just beneath the pivoting pin. The index finger and middle finger go on either side of the open blades. A stiff punch to the throat or rib cage with the dual-bladed scissors held in this manner can serve as a quick deterrent to the unwary opponent. A talented gitano can smoothly change tactics as he circles and evades his opponent, continuously adjusting his handling of the scissors to the requirements dictated—and the opportunities presented—by the vagaries of self-protection.

Other Scissors Tactics

Due to their design, scissors lend themselves to tactical applications not possible with a knife. Their smooth pivoting action allows them to be whipped about in deadly fashion by the dex-

terous navajero. Used in conjunction with a navaja, scissors become an effective defensive tool, capably intercepting an opponent's attack while enabling the navajero to simultaneously deliver his own. And their two-bladed design also doubles their potential lethality as a projectile weapon.

Whipping the Scissors

When held in a variation of the reverse grip, the scissors can be unexpectedly whipped across the opponent's eyes, face, or throat, potentially creating fearsome damage to the latter's courage, if not his anatomy. The variant reverse grip requires that the index finger be placed through the finger hole closest to the thumb. From this grip it is easy to whip the released scissors forward, twirling them around the index finger horizontally across the opponent's exposed target areas. A return twirl brings the scissors back, closed, into the original reverse grip.

Blocking with the Scissors

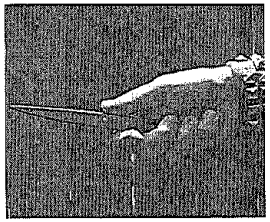
In a different variation of the reverse grip, the index finger is inserted between the scissors' two open handles, with the two exposed blades extending outward from the bottom edge of the clenched hand. In this manner the vertex formed by the scissors' opened blades can be used to stab, intercept, or catch the opponent's knife wrist. Needless to say, the scissors can also deliver a formidable two-pointed attack as well when held in this manner. This highly versatile method can be used when armed with the scissors alone or in tandem with the navaja.

Throwing the Scissors

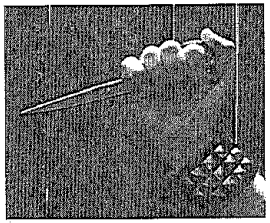
When I was 6 years old, my 5-year-old sister brought a childhood disagreement to an abrupt conclusion by hurling a pair of metal scissors at me. Although they hit the wall a full 2 feet away from my head, the fact that they hit point-first instilled within me a healthy respect for projectile weapons in general and sharp implements in particular. Little did I know then that decades later I would witness grown men throwing the same type of scis-

sors that my sister so instinctively wielded—not in anger, but in earnest; piercing their target not by chance, but by skill.

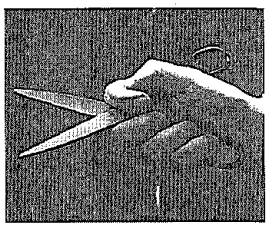
Dante can throw the open scissors 12 feet with unerring accuracy. Santiago can throw them closed—stiletto fashion—20 feet with even deadlier precision. While knife artists the world over agree that the blade used to defend oneself should never be thrown, it does no harm to have throwing accuracy with bladed weapons as a complementary skill. In fact, as I discovered when I was 6, skill is not even necessary when throwing a pair of dual-bladed scissors. Just throw them in the general direction of a person's head and take advantage of his or her inevitable reaction.



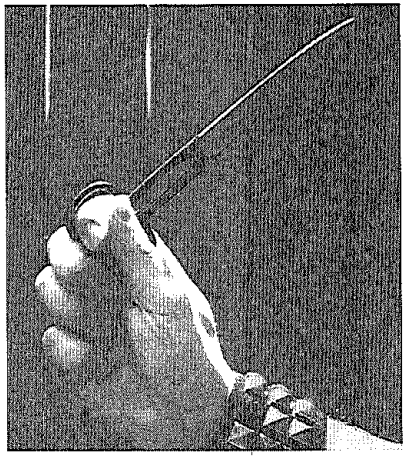
The forward grip with the scissors.



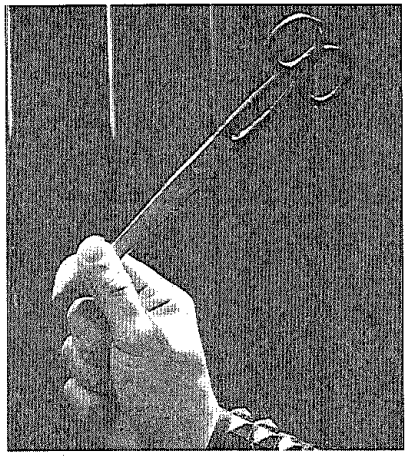
The reverse grip with the scissors.



The punch grip with the scissors.



The opened scissors throw.



The closed scissors throw.

CHAPTER 15

Cloak versus Dagger

Think ahead: today for tomorrow, and for many days beyond; the wisest of precautions, to take time for this: for to the ready there are no accidents, and to the forewarned no dangers.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

In some of the more traditional schools of edged weapons the navajeros are taught to hold the jacket in front of them in a fashion similar to the way a matador handles a cape. The intent is to intercept any committed attacks delivered by his armed opponent. Innumerable techniques are then used to ensnare and restrain the captured knife and hand, the logical goal being to either disarm the opponent or turn his knife against him.

These techniques are also practiced at Don Santiago's school, but the jacket's use as a cape is the exception rather than the rule. Santiago does not par-

ticularly favor these cape techniques because he feels that a jacket held outstretched between the two hands can be too easily grabbed and pulled by the opponent's left hand. In the space of a split-second the navajero might then find himself stabbed or slashed by the waiting knife. Rather than attempting to use their jackets as feeble barriers against a knife, Don Santiago's navajeros use them to perform maneuvers or passes known as verónicas.[1]

VERÓNICAS

The art of Sevillian Steel borrows the term verónicas (ve-ROH-nee-kas) from the art of the matador. In the "indefensible but irresistible" sport of bullfighting, when a bull first comes through the gate into the arena, the matador greets it with a series of verónicas with a large cape. Though he couldn't know it, the bull facing an armed matador is much safer than the armed man facing an unarmed navajero.

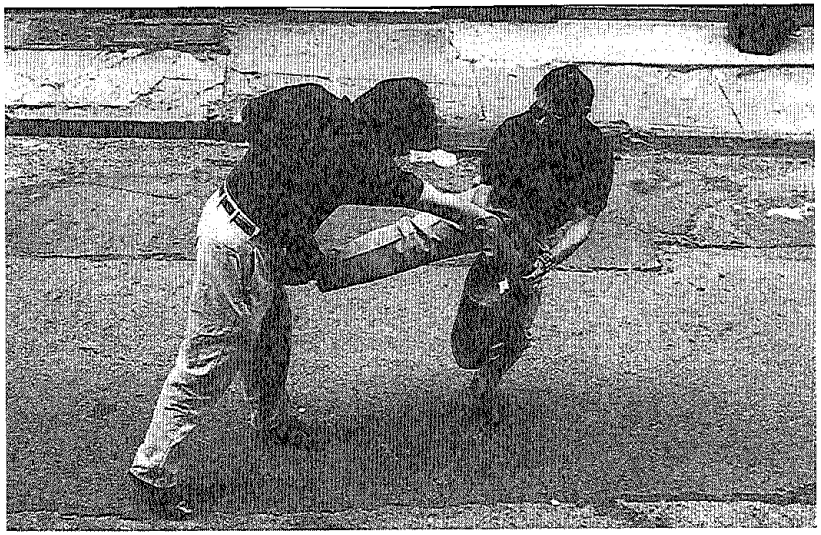
Dynamic Verónicas

The verónicas practiced at the Escuela Sevillana are infinitely more dynamic than the jacket methods taught in traditional schools. Under Santiago's direction, the jacket is held by the collar, tightly in the right hand and loosely, if at all, in the left. As a matter of course, keys or coins are kept in the jacket's side pockets to lend weight to its movements. Rather than wait for an attack to intercept it, Santiago's students actively use the jacket to whip and flail at their armed opponent. The jacket is kept constantly in motion to lessen its likelihood of being grabbed. They use it to beat down on the opponent's thrusting arm. They use it to lash out at the opponent's head. They use it to snap into the opponent's face, the eyes being the ideal target.

When aggressively attacked, the navajero still has the option of deflecting or entangling the knife and hand with the jacket. The instant the attacking knife is intercepted, the navajero counters with kicks, elbow strikes, head butts, and anything else that can disable or maim the opponent. With the exception of his

Los Barateros *by Jose Luise Pellicer illustrates the use of the jacket in navaja combat. It was originally seen in the book* Obras Completas de Mariano Jose de Lara, Montaner y Simon, *published in Barcelona in 1886.*

Verónicas applied against a navaja. The jacket should be held tightly with the right hand and lightly with the left. Verónicas should be snapped at the eyes or against the knife. If the knife is snared you must immediately follow through with decisive blows.



hands, which clutch the knife wrist in a viselike grip, any part of the body is used to strike the opponent. The feet, knees, head, and, if necessary, teeth, become the navajero's formidable and vicious anatomical weapons. Once the opponent is disarmed and incapacitated, the jacket can be thrown over his head to blind, bind, and control him. This leaves the navajero free to unrestrictedly kick, punch, choke, and otherwise neutralize him.

When confronting an armed opponent, the key to the successful use of tactics is to take advantage of any weaknesses one sees in the opponent. In Sevillian Steel one learns that because every opponent is different, the navajero must have a varied set of tactics as part of his arsenal. In using his tactics, the navajero must also be prepared to take some risks; however, he should always use the least risky tactics first. Adhere to the tenet that the best tactics are those that are least expected.

1 These basic cape maneuvers are named for the biblical Veronica, the woman who held out a cloth to Christ on his way to the crucifixion.

CHAPTER 16

A Mano Limpia

Let the wise man be sufficient unto himself. He who was all in all to himself, when carrying himself hence, carried everything with him . . . He who is thus able to live within himself is like the brute in nothing, like the sage in much, and like God in everything.

Baltasar Gracián
The Art of Worldly Wisdom

The Filipinos, renowned knife artists in their own right, have a saying that is often heard during practice when a fighter drops his weapon: "Lose your knife, lose your life!" That is not always true. While dropping your knife—the means for your survival—in a life-and-death struggle is certainly unforgivable, it need not necessarily be fatal. The innumerable unarmed fighting systems in which instruction is available today are infinitely more developed and reliable than those available to barateros and other knife-wielders of centuries past. Since accidents happen and

knives are occasionally dropped at the most inopportune moments, a thorough working knowledge of unarmed combat is critical. Regardless of the skill level one believes he possesses with a knife, training to defend against an edged weapon while unarmed is an indispensable part of every blade handler's regimen. It is for this reason that Don Santiago has his students train a mano limpia almost as much as with Sevillian Steel.

The Spanish term a mano limpia means more than just defeating an armed opponent while empty- or bare-handed. Literally "with a clean hand," the term implies hands that are so empty they are clean (i.e., there isn't even dirt on them). Significantly, however, defeating an armed opponent a mano limpia in no way meant that the baratero couldn't resort to dirty tactics. In fact, that was the expectation. Certainly, he practiced using his empty hands and booted feet against the opponent, but just as certainly he did not limit himself to these.

REALITY CHECK

The experienced fighter, along with the beginner, must always remember that knife attacks represent an extreme threat to life, a threat against which the greatest unarmed combat skills will be poor at best. Take nothing for granted: a knife attack is launched with the same speed, strength, and unpredictability as a punch. In the street, no one punches with the same care and cooperation as he does in your training hall or dojo—nor is that how an opponent will attack you with his knife. Any mistake in your response or delay in your reaction can result in very fatal errors. For this reason it is vital to develop a practical understanding of proper distancing and footwork. Quite simply, your ability in these areas of combat will greatly determine your attacker's success or failure.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

When confronting a knife-wielding opponent, assuming a

—44—

esté aun mas alta que la cabeza, descubriendo todo el pecho, como lo manifiestan las siguientes figuras; y cuando el contrario le tire la puñalada, se defendera el diestro dandole con la mano un golpe en la muñeca, y si puede ser agarrándosela por debajo; y si no, no desunirse, y al mismo tiempo huir el pie izquierdo formando con el cuerpo concavidad, y levantando el derecho

para sentarle detrás del izquierdo de su contrario; haciendo centro en el izquierdo, le echará la mano izquierda al cogote, procurando hacer todos los movimientos sin temor, y muy prontos, y se logrará la defensa. Y si hallándose el contrario en esta disposicion por haberle salido fallida su resolucion, se fuese á retirar para volver á acometer, el diestro en aquel mismo tiempo le ayudará á levantar, empujándole para que su mismo instrumento le sea en su perjuicio.

Unarmed against the navaja, from Manual del Baratero.

martial arts stance in order to punch, kick, or throw him will work against you in at least two ways. First, it will rob you of your adrenaline-driven momentum. A trained martial-arts reaction will bring you under control, which is something you want to avoid. Second, it will give your attacker the time to develop a strategy to finish you in his own armed manner. Your stance or assumed martial arts demeanor will enable him to gauge the limits of your responses while allowing him to have no limits at all.

THE IDEAL MOMENT

The ideal moment to counter an armed opponent is before the weapon is actually drawn. Obviously, this is not always possible, especially if you are the subject of an unjustified (and therefore unexpected) attack. But if you find yourself being provoked, warned, threatened, or otherwise engaged in an exchange of words with a potentially armed and violent individual, you must be ready to read his slightest cues and react to them in the quickest interval possible.

As has already been mentioned, an excellent time to deliver a preemptive strike is when the opponent is preoccupied with talking. Raul, one of the school's younger trainees, was once being berated and threatened by a muscular fellow who towered head and shoulders over him. As the belligerent fellow moved to pull open his knife, Raul spit his wad of gum dead into the fellow's yapping mouth. As the latter gagged from the impact of the gum on his palate, Raul stepped quickly forward and snapped an instep kick into the attacker's crotch. The gagging attacker dropped his still-closed knife to better nurse his traumatized genitalia. Raul sauntered away in the opposite direction, a newly acquired knife tucked snugly in his pocket.

ANOTHER GOOD MOMENT

The next best psychological moment to counter an armed opponent is the second he clears his weapon from its carry location. Most individuals who draw a weapon plan to say something to the person against whom they are drawing. They demand, threaten, gloat, or in some manner verbalize whatever is behind their brandishing of a weapon. During the brief moment when their minds are occupied with the mechanics of drawing and what they plan to say, they are generally not prepared to use the weapon. At this moment their mental focus is not exclusively on you but on what they are intent on expressing. Train yourself to become immediately alert when you see another's hand move to the inside of a jacket or into a pocket. Train yourself to move into action as soon as you notice a weapon of any type being drawn.

THE NAKED BLADE

Once an opponent's knife is drawn and escape is not possible, evading the blade becomes your primary concern. Neutralizing the opponent is your final goal. "Your body and senses," instructs Santiago, "must become like a cat's. Avoid at all cost fixating your gaze either on the attacker's eyes or his knife, as both can be used to deceive you." Focus your attention on his chest area, taking in his eyes and knife only with your peripheral vision. Remain aware of the objects and terrain in your surrounding environment as well.

"The attacker's grip on his knife will to a certain extent determine the type of attack he can use and the trajectory in which the knife will travel," explains the maestro. "Bear in mind, though, that about 85 percent of knife attacks initiated in the street are slashes, as opposed to thrusts. This means that you should tailor your training priorities accordingly." Ironically, many Asian martial arts invert the attention they give to knife attacks; about 85 percent of the knife defenses they teach are against the (improbable) straight thrust, and only 15 percent or fewer of the defenses are against the more likely slash.

"Slashes are more instinctive to the untrained hoodlum and safer for the trained thug," Don Santiago warns. "Thrusts are only used when the attacker decides to finish off the already-slashed victim. Is it not more logical, not to mention sane, to

dedicate more training time to defending against slashes rather than against thrusts?" In other words, structure your training to the reality of statistics.

THE NEXT PRIORITY

Stunning or incapacitating the assailant is your next priority. This must be done while safely evading his blade. Whenever possible, these stunning/incapacitating actions should be accomplished with a kick. The reason for this strategy is that the impact from a kick is about three times stronger than a blow delivered by the hands and that kicking an advancing opponent leaves your hands free to intercept any attack that he might still initiate.

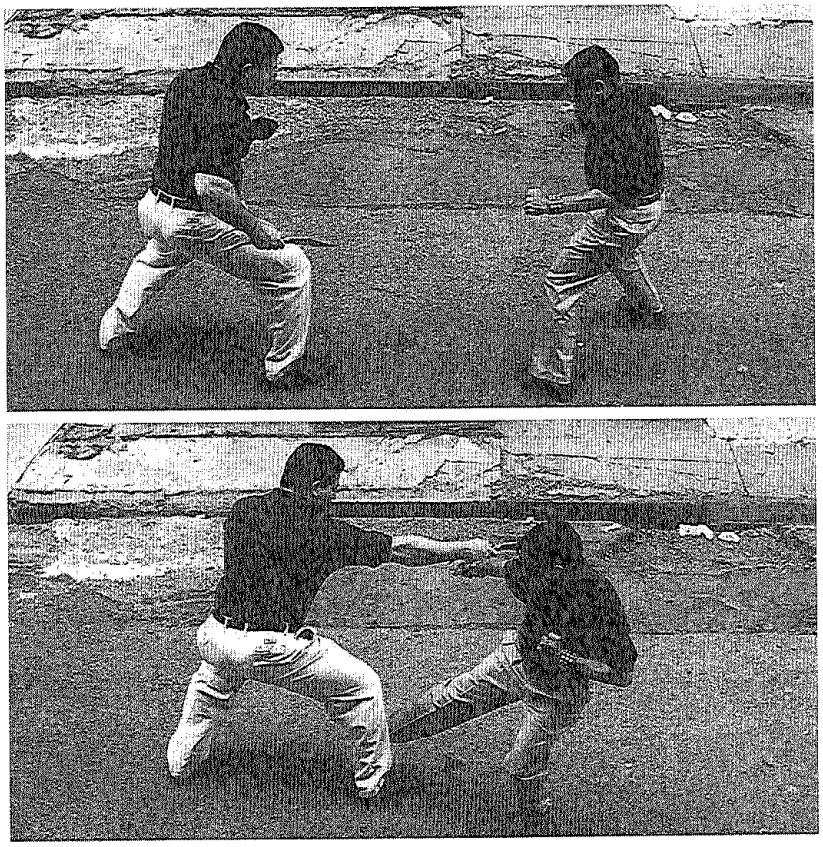
You don't have to kick like a tae kwon do practitioner; you only need an arsenal of three interception kicks (described below.) But the kicks must be mastered. Your physical response to the attack must be delivered in a hard and fast manner. On this there can be no compromise. The attacker must be dealt with soundly and quickly, for once you have demonstrated defiance to his intent, he will not provide you with a second chance.

Interception Kicks

Interception kicks are used to upset the attacker's balance and, under ideal conditions, cause him to stumble or actually fall. If an interception kick is successful in accomplishing any of these results, you must immediately capitalize on this by either escaping from the situation or neutralizing the attacker. As their name indicates, these kicks are used to intercept the attacker's movement or advance; they are not primarily intended as incapacitating attacks. To be effective, interception kicks must be aimed at the opponent's lead leg, delivered low and quick, and used in conjunction with body shifting. Three of the quickest, strongest, and most effective interception kicks are the right sickle kick, the right side stomp kick, and the left cross stomp kick. In the description of the three interception kicks, we will assume that the navajero is leading with his right leg as he faces his knife-wielding adversary.

The Sickle Kick

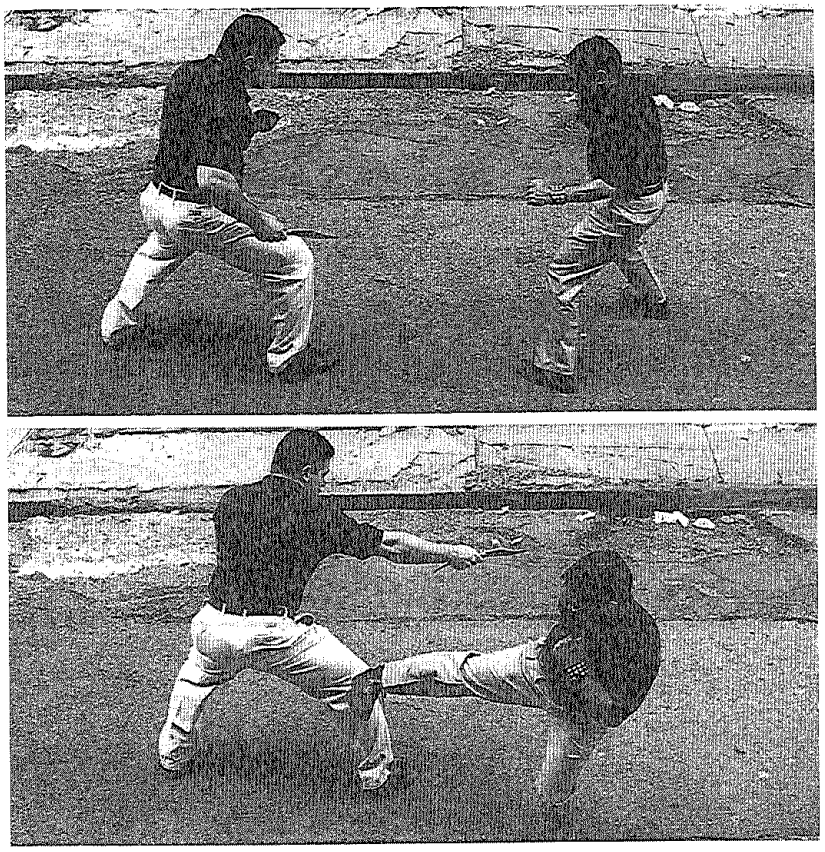
As the opponent attacks with a straight knife thrust to your midsection, step outward to the left as you evade the attack. Simultaneously deliver a very low hooking kick with your right instep to the inside of his right ankle. Hit him very low, very hard, and very fast. Be alert to any follow-up attack from the opponent and remain mentally poised to contend with it. If the kick successfully injures him, follow up with other low kicks and hand attacks, as may be appropriate.



The right sickle kick. Against a thrust to the chest, evade the attack and deliver a sickle kick to the lead ankle.

The Side Stomp Kick

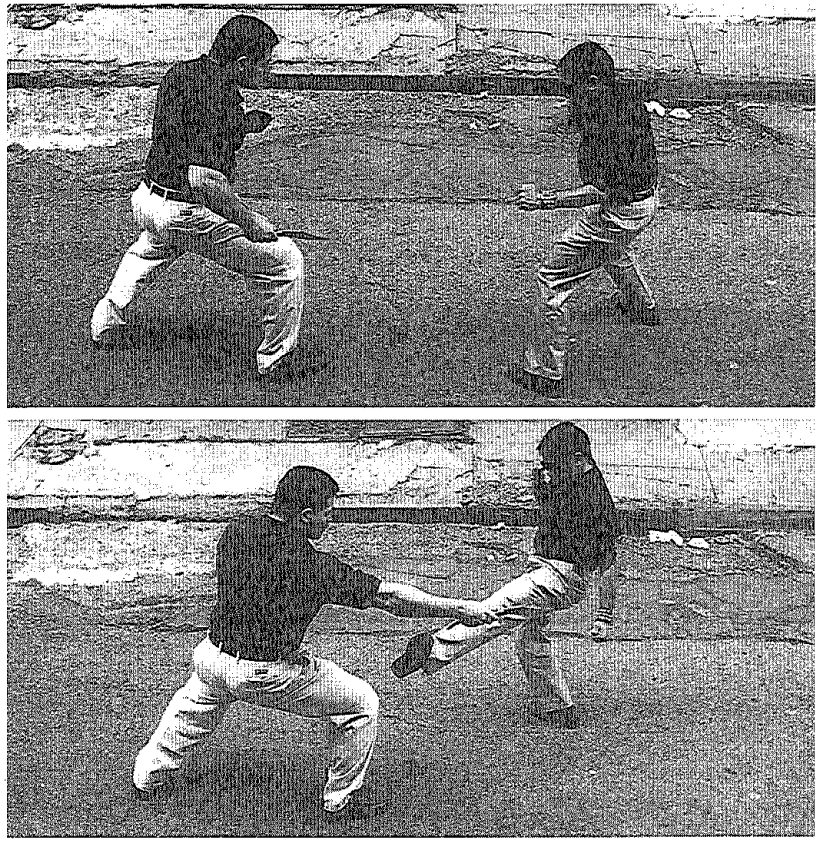
As the opponent attacks with a knife slash to your midsection, step outward to the left as you evade the attack. Simultaneously deliver a side thrust kick with your right heel to the outside of his right knee joint. Again, hit him very hard and very fast. Be alert to any follow-up attack from the opponent and remain mentally poised to contend with it. If the kick successfully injures him, follow up with other low kicks and hand attacks, as may be appropriate.



The right side stomp kick. Against a slash to the midsection, evade the attack and deliver a side stomp kick to the outside of the lead knee.

The Left Cross Stomp Kick

As the opponent attacks with a knife slash to your midsection, step away to the right to evade the attack. Simultaneously deliver a front thrust kick with your left heel to the front or inside of his right knee joint. Always hit him very hard and very fast. Be alert to any follow-up attack from the opponent and remain mentally poised to contend with it. If the kick successfully injures him, follow up with other low kicks and hand attacks as may be appropriate.



The left cross stomp kick. Against a slash to the midsection, evade the attack and deliver a cross stomp kick to the lead knee.

The reader should feel free to experiment and develop his own personal interception kicks. Remember that interception kicks must be:

- aimed at the opponent's lead leg
- delivered low, hard, and fast
- performed in conjunction with body shifting

In other words, do not just stand there and kick: move and kick.

YOUR BODY AS A WEAPON

One of the few times in combat when strength provides an unconditional advantage, as opposed to the many situations where its benefit is only relative, is in defending against an armed opponent. Here, the attribute of strength is decidedly beneficial in two particular areas of combat: gripping and striking. If you are able to secure a grip on the opponent's knife hand or wrist, do not release it until either he drops the knife or you drop him. Recognize that even if you secure a viselike grip on his knife hand, you will still have to prevent his desperate attempts to retrieve the weapon with his free hand. You must also be ready to withstand whatever blows he may direct at you with his free hand or feet, realizing that these will be far easier to sustain than a lethal attack from his blade.

Since, at this point, your hand's sole preoccupation is to keep a grip on the wrist of his knife-wielding hand, other parts of your body must become your anatomical weapons. You must train to make them versatile and deadly at close quarters. Typically undramatic techniques such as head butts, knee strikes, and foot stomps must all be capable of inflicting devastating damage to the opponent. While grappling is currently in vogue and undeniably has its merits in total combat, its suitability against a skilled knife-wielder is questionable. Your goal, after all, is not to pin him or make him tap out; your goal is to neutralize him and walk away as unscathed as possible. (The best Brazilian jujutsu

opponent would find it impossible to grapple, tackle, or choke a Sevillian navajero, particularly with the amount of blood that would be flowing out of the grappler's severed hand tendons.)

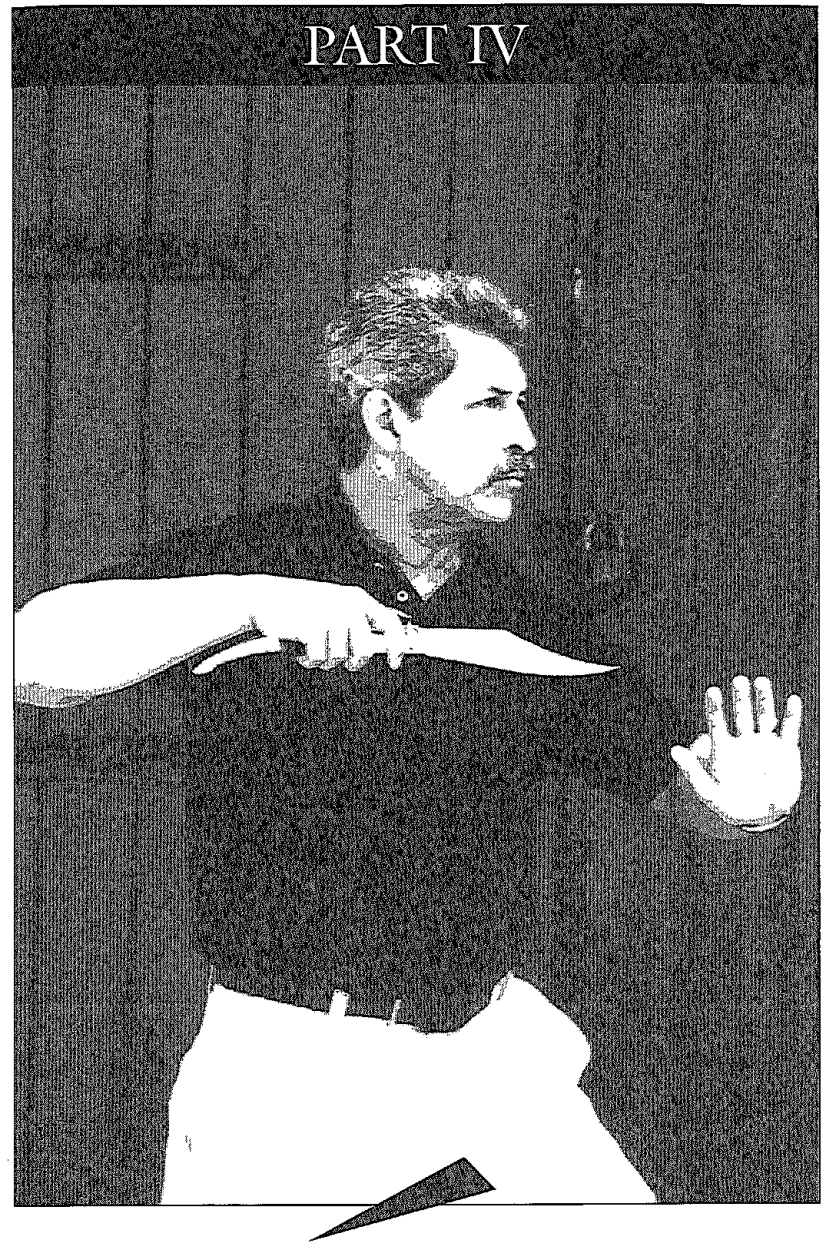
YOUR BLOOD AS A WEAPON

Speaking of blood, the final piece of advice in this chapter was taught to me by ninjutsu grandmaster Ronald Duncan during my early days of training. He explained that many times a would-be knife-fighter has gotten his courage from a bottle. Other times his bravado is forced on him from either peer pressure or a pathetic sense of machismo. In such cases the would-be knife-fighter has no real idea of what he is getting himself into. If he cuts you, it will probably be due to his luck rather than his ability. If you happen to be cut by one of these big men with little knives and an even littler sense of worth, it is important that you keep your wits about you long enough to bring him down. Expect to panic but do not succumb to it.

If the cut is on your hand, whip it forward and sprinkle your blood on his face, chest, or hands. The actual sight and feel of blood will often give the would-be knife-fighter an abrupt awakening. He will get a sense of the seriousness of the situation he's gotten himself into. He will also have a sense of panic over what he has done to you and how antagonized you must be. The moment he falters, you must enter with resolve to subdue him. Do not turn your back on a big man who has unwittingly cut you, for he will show you how little he really is and attempt to stab you in the back. Only after you have thoroughly subdued him should you attend to your wound or seek medical attention.

The most critical advice to follow when you find yourself knifeless: incapacitate your attacker in the quickest way possible. You must be relentless; in an actual fight, you cannot let a knife in the ribs stop you. Take him down with all the uninhibited savagery you can muster. Where feasible, turn his own blade against him. Most importantly, make certain you don't leave him standing.

PART IV



Staying Safe and Selecting Steel

CHAPTER 17

First Aid and Gypsy Remedies

It is generally accepted as gospel that no one, whether victor or loser, can escape from a knife encounter unscathed. However, having witnessed the high level of skill possessed by most of my instructors (and, satisfyingly, many of my own students), I'm not certain that I would consider receiving an injury to be a given factor. On the other hand, a person can sustain serious cuts and wounds simply through improper training methods or carelessness during practice. For either reason—wounds from combat or accidents in practice—it is critical that one have a basic but solid understanding of first aid procedures as they apply to knife-related injuries.

SAFETY DURING TRAINING

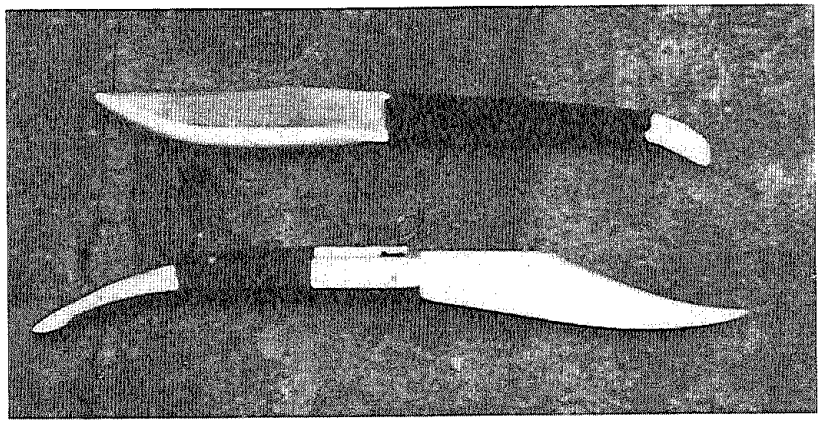
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is as

true as it is familiar. Avoid unnecessary accidents during training by taking the proper precautions. If you are new to knife fighting, do not train with live blades until you have attained a measurable level of proficiency in knife handling. At the school, students are put through the following phases of weapons familiarization without argument or embarrassment:

- training with real knives with dulled edges
- training with real knives with taped edges
- training with real knives

The process may sound tedious, but it yields skilled and confident navajeros. Just as importantly, they are still intact at this point in their training. How long they remain that way now depends on them.

In the East, hurting arts and healing arts were originally both integrated in the same combat curriculum. It is amazing to note that today, while thousands of studios teach ninjutsu, tantojutsu, kali/eskrima, and other forms of stylized knife-fighting, very few of them provide their students with formal instruction on the proper treatment of knife injuries. As comforting as it



Ideally, your training knife (top) should approximate your actual knife's (bottom) size, weight, and feel.

may be to realize that studio instructors do not attempt to teach what they don't know, it should be a concern to students that they are not learning how to treat the potential injuries that may be sustained in actual combat.

The First Aid Kit

A basic first aid kit should be a part of every training studio, especially those whose students learn weapons use or engage in contact sparring. In addition to standard contents such as sterile pads, adhesive tape, gauze, cotton balls, butterfly sutures, bandages, scissors, tweezers, safety pins, and so forth, the following items should be a part of your first aid kit for the treatment of cuts and lacerations:

- *Latex gloves:* wear them to administer any first aid procedures.
- *Normal saline solution:* use instead of tap water for initially washing the injury. Unlike tap water, normal saline solution is sterile and closely approximates the water found in the human body.
- *Antibacterial soap or liquid, or Betadine solution:* use as an antiseptic wash. Excess should be removed with a dry gauze.
- *Antimicrobial ointment, such as Neosporin or Bacitracin:* use to fully cover superficial cuts or wide-area abrasions.

The studio should also have a designated area, whether permanent or improvised, for isolating and treating training-related injuries. Isolation from the other students is necessary in a time of blood-borne pathogens, as is a standardized procedure for the safe and proper treatment of open cuts. A supply of bleach must also be kept on hand to disinfect the floor or mat areas where blood has spilled.

Initial Procedures

When blood is spilled (from a cut on the hand, a punch to the mouth, etc.), the bleeding student must immediately alert the instructor and remove himself from the company of other stu-

dents. The instructor or his representative must don latex gloves, clear the area of the studio where blood has spilled, isolate the injured student in the designated treatment area, and begin first aid treatment. (Depending on the gravity of the injury, professional medical attention may have to be summoned.)

The rate at which blood is lost from a wound depends on the size and kind of blood vessel ruptured. Injury to an artery may be identified by bright red, spurting blood, in contrast to the welling, dark red blood from a vein. In case of a major arterial rupture the victim may bleed to death within a minute. Venous and minor arterial injuries have a less critical time limit but, if left unattended, also may be fatal. A serious consequence of extensive bleeding is shock, which must be considered as soon as the flow of blood has been checked.

Simple Cuts

The body responds to most simple cuts with the eventual formation of a scab over the wound to protect it from germs as natural healing occurs. First aid in the form of cleaning the cut and applying antiseptic must be performed before the scabbing process begins. The basic steps for treating the simple cuts that may occur during training are as follows:

1. Wash and clean the hands with antibacterial soap or liquid before donning latex gloves.
2. Use a gauze pad or sterile cotton balls soaked in antiseptic to cleanse the cut. Stroke the gauze through and past the cut in fluid motions to sweep away germs.
3. Use clean gauze or cotton to dry the cut.
4. Dress the cut. Select a gauze pad or bandage to cover the injury, depending on the size and nature of the injured area.
5. Monitor the cut. If you notice excessive or prolonged oozing, redness, inflammation, or tenderness, seek medical attention.

Puncture Wounds

A deep cut or puncture wound is significantly more serious than a simple cut and must be properly treated as soon as possible. If the wound is deep, it may bleed very little, increasing the potential for infection. It is also more likely that a puncture wound can damage a tendon or nerve. If profuse bleeding is the case, first stop the bleeding before seeking medical assistance. As logical as this may sound now, it may not be obvious to you in your moment of panic. The basic steps for treating a serious wound are as follows:

1. Apply direct pressure to the wound with clean gauze, sterile cotton balls, or a handkerchief.
2. If severe bleeding continues after the application of direct pressure, elevate the wound above the level of the heart to slow the flow of blood. Continue direct pressure.
3. If severe bleeding continues even after direct pressure and elevation of the wound, apply pressure to the main artery that supplies the affected area. For a wound on the arm, apply pressure to the brachial artery, compressing it against the arm bone. For a wound on the leg, apply pressure to the femoral artery by forcing the artery against the pelvic bone.
4. Seek professional medical attention as soon as possible. Suturing, as well as other procedures, will generally be required and a tetanus injection may be necessary if the person has not had one within 10 years.

Emergency Procedures

Makeshift dressings that become saturated with blood should not be removed but may be reinforced with additional layers.

If no dressing material is available, or if the victim is rapidly losing blood from a wound on one of the extremities, pressure may be applied with the flat side of the fingers to the blood-supplying artery. You must learn the locations of the pressure points

where the artery passes close enough to the skin to permit its compression against the underlying bone.

The Location of Pressure Points

The major pressure point on the brachial artery, which supplies blood to the arm, is located approximately halfway between the elbow and the armpit on the inner side of the arm. Severe bleeding from a wound on the hand or the lower arm may be checked by grasping the arm firmly between the thumb and the fingers, which are placed over the pressure point.

The major pressure point on the femoral artery, which supplies blood to the leg, is situated on the front center part of the diagonally slanted "hinge" of the leg, in the crease of the groin area, where the artery crosses over the pelvic bone. The heel of the hand pressed firmly at this point stems the flow of blood from a leg wound.

The two arterial branches that supply blood to the head are the temporal and the facial arteries. Circulation of the blood to the face may be impeded by pressing against the underside of the lower jawbone, about an inch in front of the angle of the jaw, with the side of the index finger or of the hand. Bleeding of the head above the eyes may be checked by pressure applied at a point just in front of the ear.

GYPSY REMEDIES

The use of essential oils is a respected and reliable means of treating the small nuisance cuts one unavoidably receives through carelessness in either knife handling or training. As Dante explained, Spanish Gypsies are adept in mixing essential oils and herbs for the treatment of ailments and injuries. They learned these skills out of necessity, in the days when mainstream society viewed them as social pariahs and denied them medical treatment. This discrimination, which had actually been supported by laws, has largely disappeared, and now many of their remedies for cuts and wounds have merged with the baratero subculture and become integrated into the art of Sevillian Steel.

Lavender Oil

Lavender oil (*Lavendula angustifolium*), like many essential oils, is a natural antiseptic. It is also a natural antibiotic that promotes healing and prevents scabbing. More importantly, it is an excellent promoter of tissue repair, contributing to the healing process by stimulating the cells of a wound to regenerate more quickly.

Tea Tree Oil

Tea tree oil (*Maleleuca alternifolia*) is not only one of the most powerful essential oils but, as an antiseptic, is believed to be 12 to 15 times more potent than carbolic. Tea tree oil's significant antiviral and antibacterial properties also make it highly beneficial in the prevention of infection to cuts and wounds.

At the Escuela Sevillana, lavender and tea tree oils are used to treat cuts or lacerations. When used together, the two oils work synergistically to accelerate healing.

CHAPTER 18

Selecting Your Steel

The selection of any weapon intended for self-protection is a personal matter which deserves as much, if not more, deliberation as goes into the choosing of a combat instructor. A certain trust and rapport must be present in each case. The obvious reason why proper weapon selection is important is because your life may someday depend on that weapon. Changing your mind and getting another one will not be an option when your life is at stake. The proper choice must be made now, when you have time, clarity, and selection. Another reason proper selection is important is because not only must the weapon be of good quality, construction, and design, but it must also fit your hand and your fighting style like the proverbial glove. The deadliest .357 Magnum is less than worthless in the hands of a child who cannot hold it to fire.

OBTAINING SEVILLIAN STEEL

In Seville proper, the students obtain their steel from the Madrigal family, who practice their traditional cutlery trade in a quaint part of the city known as the Barrio de Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz is Seville's former Judería, or Jewish quarter, where Sephardic goldsmiths, silversmiths, and artisans crafted jewelry, cutlery, and other types of metallurgic art. (It was in this barrio that Santiago plied his cutlery trade as a young man.) The Madrigal navajas are still manufactured with Old World pride and craftsmanship.

Today, as in centuries gone by, the city of Toledo continues to produce some of the finest European fighting blades. Fortunately (or unfortunately if you enjoy visiting unique and exotic cities), one does not have to travel to Toledo to acquire a formidable piece of Sevillian Steel.

Any knife that you feel comfortable and confident with is appropriate for self-protection, but if you want to know what it is like to handle true Sevillian Steel, several manufacturers in Spain produce traditional Spanish navajas with quality blades and designs that are true to the originals. Two leaders in the art are Jose Martínez and Muela, both of whom distribute their fine quality cutlery on a worldwide scale and are represented in the United States by C.A.S. Iberia, Inc. (whose address appears in the back of this book). Apart from these, many other long-established Spanish manufacturers, such as Andujar, Bustos, and Rojas, have been producing excellent knives for many generations. To be avoided are the inferior knives produced in Pakistan and Taiwan that are advertised as navaja replicas.

BLADE MARKINGS

The navajas manufactured in Spain today carry a number of acid-etched markings on the left side of the blade. These markings generally refer to the city of manufacture, the family of cutlers, and often the model number of the particular design.

"MARTINEZ Santa Cruz 11," for example, means that the navaja is a Martínez family design, manufactured in Santa Cruz, and the model number of the design is 11. Markings bearing the words Albacete, Andujar, and, of course, Toledo, indicate other very popular sources of navajas and high quality cutlery.

While the navajas intended for export have the words "Made in Spain" acid-etched on the left side of the blade, those distributed in Spain and throughout Europe bear the word INOX. Not being familiar with a city or town called Inox, I asked Magdalena where it was located. After she had laughed at my question for a full minute, the maestro's daughter regained enough of her composure to explain me that INOX was short for "inoxidable" or, as we say in English, stainless steel.

FRENCH COUSINS

The woman waving the open folding knife four inches from my face said, "Thees ees the best-made knife een thee world!" I had ventured into the picturesque Old City in Nice looking for French folding knives to complement my collection of navajas. Unabashedly desperate to make a sale, the woman waving the blade was animatedly telling me that her knives' versatility and reliability were world-renowned. "Notheeng comes close to thees, m'sieur," she emphasized with a wave of her Laguiole (la-YOLE).

Laguiole

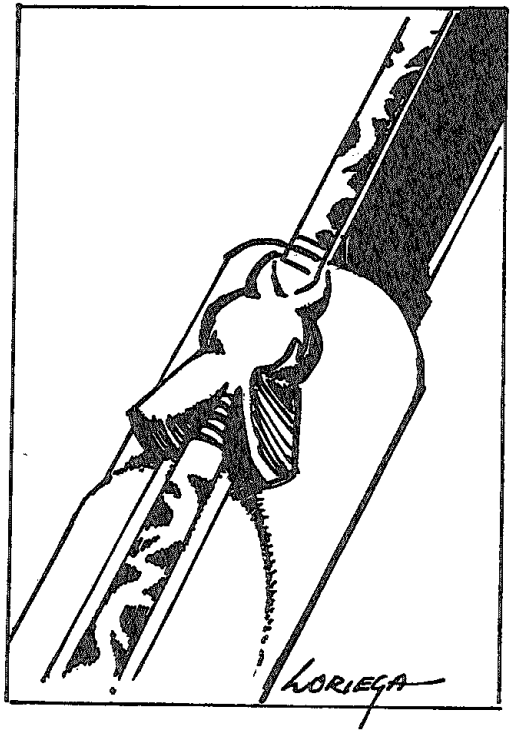
I told her that every country both in and out of the Mediterranean had a knife about which they made the exact same claim. The Spanish, I teased, alleged the same qualities to their own sevillanas, and the Sicilians to their mulettos. "They are mere imitations of our Laguiole, m'sieur. Please, decide eef you are going to buy it. I am closing now at noon and weel not reopen unteel next Tuesday."

I remained unmoved, recalling Sánchez's revelation that "those navajas that began to appear almost a century later in southern France, probably fashioned by emigrant craftsmen, were nothing

A display window full of Laguioles in Nice.

more than copies of the original models produced by Spanish artisans." I opted not to buy.

French history supports Sánchez's assertion. The original Laguiole knives were manufactured in small quantities in the French village of Laguiole in the Aubrac region of France. According to the Societe Laguiole, the birth of their knife was inspired in 1829 by a design that blended the lines of the Spanish navaja with those of a local fixed-blade knife called the *capuchadou*. During the early 1830s these folding knives were produced commercially by the forge of Pierre Jean Calmels and soon became popular with the shepherds and cattlemen throughout south central France. Today, Laguiole knives continue to be handmade in this small town of the Aveyron department under the supervision of the Societe Laguiole.



Napoleon's imperial bee adorns all authentic Laguioles.

The modern blades are produced from 440 stainless steel, with filework at the top of the spine. Handle materials offer a variety of options, although horn seems to be the Frenchman's preference. Some Laguioles have a cross made of small rivets on the side of their handles. According to legend, this allowed Aubrac peasants to thrust their knives into the ground so as to pray in front of the cross.

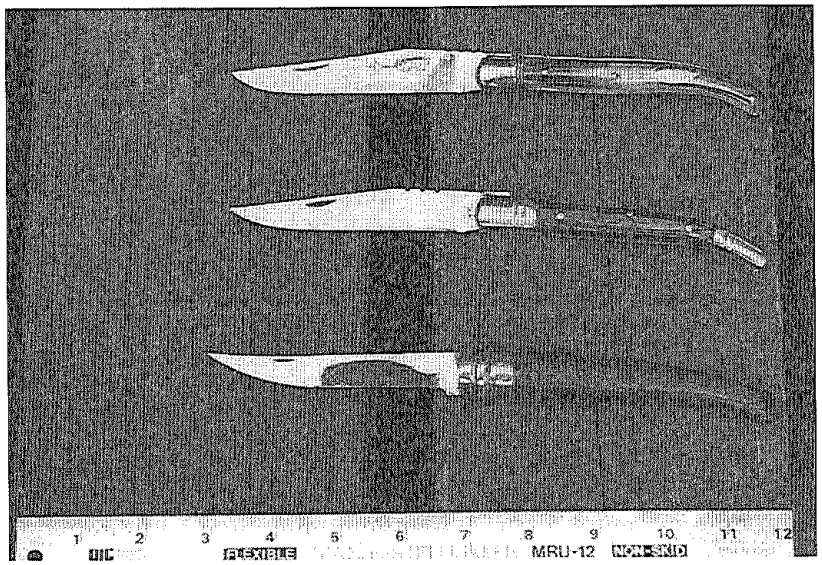
The best-known identifying feature

of the Laguiole knife is the small sculpted bee that is part of its spring mechanism. Local tradition has it that the bee is symbolic of the imperial bee awarded by Napoleon I to the citizens of Laguiole for loyal service. A recent and less dramatic explanation is that the "bee" is actually a fly of the variety that plagues the village's cows and sheep.

Laguiole knives mimic the lines of the Spanish navaja in profile but are generally smaller and lighter in weight. More significantly, the major flaw in the French Laguiole design is the lack of the clasp mechanism, so indispensable to lock the blade open. Thus, while today's Laguioles are as well made as the Niçoise woman claimed, they are nonetheless sterilized French versions of the dramatic navaja.

Opinel

The French cutlery house Opinel, well-known in the United States for many years, has recently added a folding fillet knife

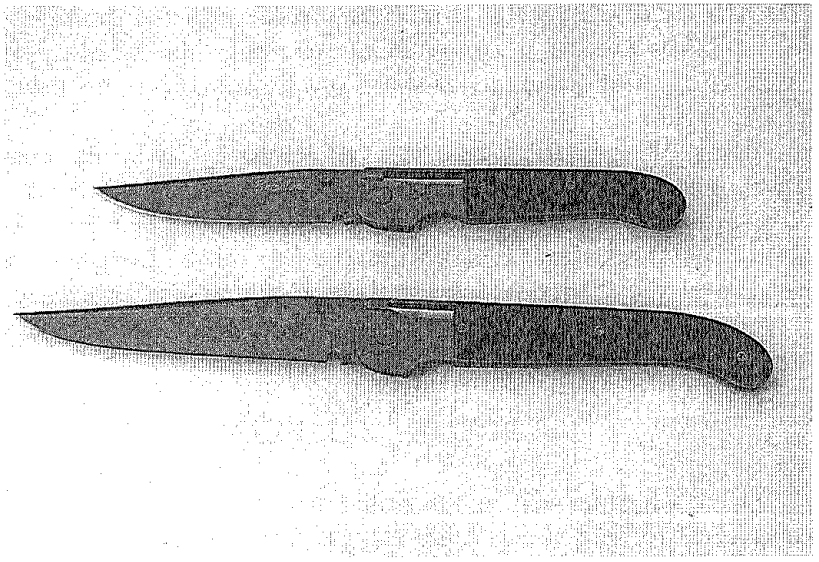


Examples of the Laguiole (top, center) and the Opinel (bottom).

design to its product line that closely resembles a navaja. Opinels are simply constructed with a minimum of moving parts and without the use of any springs. The knives are characterized by the twist-lock bolster that allows the blade to be locked in the open position. While the knife's intended function is for filleting fish, the line of its blade and the ergonomic contour of the handle, together with its twist-lock mechanism for safety, make it suitable for self-protection when a real navaja is not to be found.

AMERICAN SOLUTIONS

At least one American manufacturer has sought to remedy the need for a locking mechanism in "French navajas." Arkansas knifemaker Pat Crawford has crafted an elegant knife named simply the French Folder, which he told me was inspired by the Laguiole. The French Folder combines Crawford's own "framelock" mechanism, well-known in the knife industry, with the tra-



Pat Crawford's French Folder. (Photo courtesy Crawford Knives)

ditional navaja profile. The blade is crafted from ATS-34 steel, and the handle materials come in either stag or micarta. Overall blade length is 4 1/2 inches in either a bead-blasted or satin finish. Crawford's innovative design apparently gained the approval of the French themselves, as the knife took second place in the 1992 Paris Knife Show. I'm pleased to say that, as far as American-made knives go, Mr. Crawford's French Folder hefts, balances, and handles in very similar fashion to the serious 19th-century street-fighting navajas in Don Santiago's collection.

American "Navajas"

For readers who are loyal and patriotic consumers, insistent on only buying American, there are a number of stateside knife manufacturers that have recently co-opted the Spanish navaja's design. These knives are not navajas in the true sense, but their design features allow them to easily function as such. Les De Asis' Benchmade Knife Company has been making the Advanced Folding Combat Knife (AFCK) for several years now. De Asis, as knowledgeable as he is personable, enlisted the expertise of Chris Caracci, a former SEAL, to design the AFCK. The knife's edge and design are as sharp and formidable as any navaja I've wielded.

Lynn Thompson's Cold Steel of Ventura, California, currently has two product offerings that have a navaja silhouette. The first is its extra-large Voyager, a lockback folder with a 5-inch blade available with either standard or serrated edges. The second is the Vaquero Grande, which sports the innovative "Nogales" recurved blade. Both knives are well-suited for tactics and strategies used in the arts of Sevillian Steel.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Selection, obviously, is a personal matter, and what one man may deem to be a useless knife may perform wonderfully in the hands of another. Some knife attributes may be important to you; others not. Consider those that are and factor your specific

defense needs and combat characteristics into the decision. And remember: there's no law (yet) that says you may only own one knife. As you research and experiment with various types of weapons, acquire any or all that you feel comfortable with. After all, one day it could be your life that's at stake.

CHAPTER 19

True to Its Name

A few brief words of counsel have been reserved for the reader as he reaches the end of these chapters. The first piece of advice is to personalize this book. The book's value, however insignificant, is not in being neatly restocked on the shelves of your knife library, but in being reread, marked, highlighted, absorbed, perhaps even questioned and challenged. Internalize the information. Each chapter's inclusion bespeaks its contents' importance. The decision as to how you will defend yourself if your life is threatened is a uniquely personal one. If the knife is among your choices, especially review Chapter 12, "La Navaja Compañera."

NO ME SAQUES EN VANO

This brings us to a second piece of advice: keep the navaja

true to its name. In Spanish, its full name is navaja de bolsillo. In French, its name is couteau de poche. In English, pocket knife. Strive to keep the navaja true to its name: strive to keep it—ever unrequired—in your pocket. To borrow an idiomatic expression from today's youth: keep it in your pants.

This piece of advice comes not from some new legal perspective, but from an old moral one. Even the navajas of some of the most skilled barateros of old Andalusia bore an inscription on the surface of the blade intended to remind them that life-and-death combat was no frivolous undertaking: *No Me Saques En Vano.* Don't draw me in vain! The same admonition applies today. Do not flaunt it, intimidate with it, or use it as a conversation starter. However, should the occasion to defend yourself ever justify it, remember that it resides ever faithfully at your side.

The end as illustrated by Gustave Doré.

About the Author

James Loriega is the founder of the New York Ninpokai, a traditional Japanese dojo where he has taught koga-ryu ninjutsu and related martial arts since 1980. Having begun his ninjutsu training in 1967 under grandmaster Ronald Duncan, the acknowledged "Father of American Ninjutsu," Mr. Loriega currently holds the rank of shihan, or master instructor, in koga-ryu ninjutsu. Among his other martial credentials are a godan rank (5th-degree black belt) in tsugawa-ryu ninjutsu under shihan John Williams and a shodan rank (1st-degree black belt) in daito-ryu aikijujutsu from shihan John Denora.

In August of 1996, the author received formal certification as an instructor de armas blancas Sevillanas under maestro de armas Santiago Rivera, the

headmaster of the Escuela Sevillana de Armas Blancas. At that time he was also granted permission to open a recognized branch of the Escuela Sevillana in New York City. The New York branch offers instruction in folding knife, stiletto, sword-cane, walking stick, improvised weaponry, and unarmed combatives. When not traveling to conduct seminars, the author divides his time between teaching in New York City and training in Seville and Nice.

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Sources for Navajas and other Relevant Addresses

Spanish navajas:

C.A.S. Iberia, Inc.
5900 Cassandra Smith Road
Hixson, TN 37343

Cuchilleria Ramirez, S.L.
Poligono Industrial Campollano C/. A - 13
02006 Albacete, Spain

Training navajas:

New Age Martial Arts
130 East 115th Street, Suite 3C
New York, NY 10029
e-mail: franco95@aol.com

French Laguioles:

Laguiole Couteaux
9, Rue des Landes
69290 Craponne, France

Actiforge
4, Impasse des Avenues
BP 45
42600 Montbrison, France

French Folder:

Pat Crawford Knives
205 N. Center Street,
West Memphis, AR 72301

American Substitutes:

Benchmade Knife Co.
300 Beavercreek Rd.
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