

A FISTFUL OF DYNAMITE "The Kubotan" (Self-Defense Key Chain)

By Andrew Breen

What is the most common martial arts weapon in the United States?

Undoubtedly, the most popular, and quite possibly the most versatile personal defense weapon is the Kubotan. Carried by thousands of men and women, martial artists and non-practitioners alike.

A Karate practitioner may prefer striking techniques, utilizing the ends of the Kubotan for painful blows to soft tissue areas or disabling blows to an opponent's vital points. Conversely, a Ju-Jitsu or Aikido stylist may feel more comfortable with hooking, trapping, and pain compliance techniques, using the leverage and intense pain generated by the Kubotan to immobilize an adversary's limbs. Even for those without experience in a martial art, the Kubotan provides an economical and easily learned method of self-protection.

The most basic applications involve striking or poking vulnerable areas of the body with the Kubotan. Generally speaking, swinging strikes work better against bony surfaces while fleshy areas are more susceptible to pokes and jabs with the ends of the Kubotan.

With this concept in mind, a person avoids the confusion and frustration of trying to remember specific strikes for specific targets. Instead, one simply remembers to strike bones and poke nerve centers and pressure points. The Kubotan greatly intensifies the destructive power of any blow. Consequently, it is not necessary to waste time or miss an opportunity by trying to be overly precise. It is better to react naturally. For example, the fundamental objective of striking the arm may entail hitting the elbow; but it can also mean hitting the wrist, back of the hand, or the knuckles. There are many worthy targets aside from the arm.

The shin, hip, collarbone, ankle, and kneecap are all desirable targets. A sharp crack to a bony area will prompt an assailant to discontinue his attack. A harder, well-placed blow can easily break bones, especially if clothing does not diminish the blow.

Kubotan strikes are most effective at medium range such as when an assailant reaches out to grab or push his victim. The extending limb can be disabled with a quick, snapping strike. The tactic also works against a punch or kick. When the opponent attacks, move away and meet his technique with a quick flick of the Kubotan.

The blow does not have to be perfect; since the nerves are so close to the surface of most bony areas, even glancing blow will inflict enough pain to make your attacker regret his actions. If an attacker has already managed to grab onto an individual, he or she can break the hold by pressing or poking the Kubotan into whatever target presents itself.

Although one's movements are restricted when caught in a headlock, bear hug, or choke, Sensei Freedman recommends jamming the tip into whatever part of the attacker's anatomy that you can reach. "There are no wrong movements; make a technique work from the position you find yourself in," counsels Freedman. Accordingly, a hard thrust with the Kubotan to the kidneys, ribs, or sternum can devastate an attacker and damage internal organs.

Since there are such a wide variety of ways to use the Kubotan, there is no one correct way to hold the weapon. Different strikes require different grips and much depends upon an individual's personal preferences. According to Kubotan Instructor Sensei Freedman, how one holds the Kubotan depends entirely upon the situation.

"If you're pinned from behind, you might want to hold it like an ice pick to stab backwards. Another option for poking is to place the kubotan loosely so that it can slide through the hand." Freedman also stresses using not only the Kubotan itself but also the keys that are usually attached.

"You can hold onto the keys that are usually attached. "You can hold onto the keys and swing the Kubotan; or you can grip the Kubotan and swing the keys. For those proficient in martial arts that emphasize grappling and joint locks, the Kubotan provides added leverage. Wristlocks, arm bars, come-alongs, chokes, and leg locks instantly become more agonizing with the Kubotan. The Kubotan can be used to dig into the wrist or elbow joint.

Similarly, a captured leg can be immobilized with grinding pressure to the ankle or knee. In life threatening circumstances, the Kubotan can intensify choking techniques and, if need be, crush an assailant's trachea. Indeed, nearly all joint locking techniques common to Jujutsu and Aiki-Jutsu become easier to apply with the Kubotan. The weapon's rigidity makes it much more resistant to an opponent's efforts to power out of a hold or lock. Obviously, a fundamental knowledge of anatomy and the body's lever points are necessary to make these techniques work-with or without a Kubotan.

The Kubotan is also valuable for snagging limbs before or after applying a striking technique. By holding the weapon with several inches protruding, you can hook a part of the attacker's body with the Kubotan and then follow up with an immediate strike. You can reverse the process and strike first, hooking the neck or wrist to control the opponent's balance. In effect, the Kubotan enables an individual to literally lasso a foe's head, forcing it downward, backward, or to the side. A person's body will follow in the same direction that his head is being jerked, making him extremely vulnerable.

Make no mistake, the Kubotan is not a magic wand. But it is one of the few conceivable martial arts weapons that are legal and entirely unregulated. There is a reason, of course. Despite its popularity among martial artists, to most people, the Kubotan is little more than a nondescript key ring. Even for those in the martial arts and law enforcement communities who recognize its potential, the Kubotan does not invoke the unsavory connotations and legal difficulties of many other edged and impact weapons.

While the Kubotan is not particularly intimidating, like its ancestor, the yawara, it remains a superbly versatile instrument for self-defense. Although it requires a modest amount of training to develop competence, in the right hands, the Kubotan truly becomes a fistful of dynamite.