

Self-Defense by Womenⁱ

By Major W.E. Fairbairn

Major Fairbairn is the originator of the Fairbairn system of close combat – the ruthless, crippling and lethal tactics of Commandos and parachute troops. His methods were adopted by the British Army and Navy in 1941 and he is now in this country on loan to the United States armed forces, teaching instructors. His recent book "Get Tough!" demonstrating his methods is soon to be followed by one for women entitled "Hands Off!" to be published by D. Appleton-Century Company.

As the war has brought new freedoms and new duties to women so has it brought increased hazards. Dimmed-out streets, the necessity of going into areas they would not ordinarily enter, and at times of night when they would ordinarily be safe at home, the increase of lawlessness that seems to be a by-product of the larger violence of war – these and other factors increase the chances that a woman may have to defend herself against sudden attack.

Women are accepting the added danger with courage. But the fact is that the danger can be greatly minimized – perhaps more important, the fear of being helpless against attack can be largely removed – if women will learn a few simple measures of defense. Some of those measures originally worked out for men have been adapted to the smaller stature and slighter strength of women.

All of these measures call for study and practise. They must be learned so that they can be called on quickly, smoothly and surely. In practice but a small fraction of full strength is used, but when called for there must be no withholding, no restraint. The attacker is ruthless and the woman must be.

For one example among many, study the umbrella defense. The usual reaction would be for the woman to try to beat her attacker over the head with it. This not only will not stop a man, it may serve to enrage him. But used as shown – the same way a Commando can use a short stick – an umbrella in a woman's hands can break a man's hold, break his jaw, blind him, crush his Adam's apple. In fact, it can kill him.

COAT HOLD



An assailant seizes the girl by the left shoulder. She swings her left hand up, grips his elbow and locks her right hand over her left.

Twisting his elbow over clockwise and turning to her right, she brings the man to his knees where he is held by pressure on his arm.

WRIST HOLD – ONE HAND



Assailant has seized her right wrist with his left hand. To make him release his hold she bends her arm upward toward her shoulder.

In the same fast and continuous movement the girl twists her wrist over toward his thumb. The combined movements open his hand.

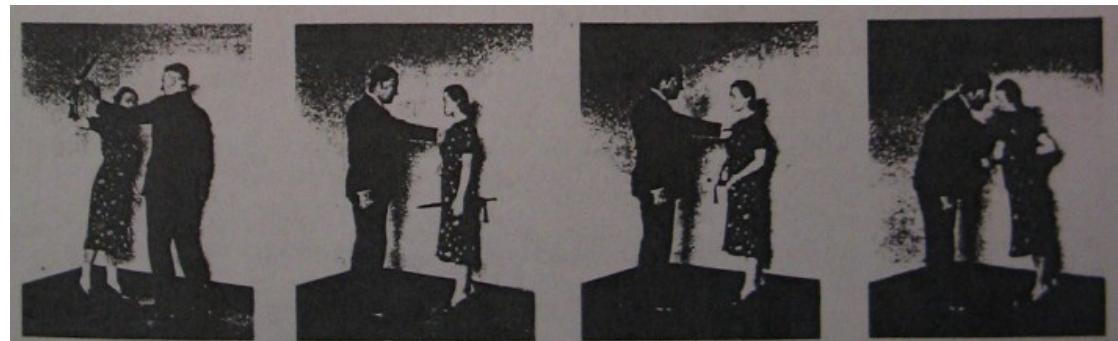
WRIST HOLD – TWO HANDS



When the girl is seized by both hands she bends both elbows up toward her body, twisting her wrists over and out as above.

In alternative defense against the two wrist hold the girl jerks her forearms toward her at the same time butting him in the chin or face.

UMBRELLA DEFENSE



This is the wrong start for using the umbrella as a defense. Every move is "telegraphed" in advance and blows do little real damage.

The proper start has the umbrella held apparently casually in one hand when the girl is accosted or grabbed body one or both shoulders.

A single movement swings the tip of the umbrella up to the other hand. Note the "bayoneting" grip – one hand over, other hand under.

This is not a straight jab but a slashing movement across the stomach. The man will automatically pull back, duck his head



The man's action has put him in position for the next move, part of the same continuous action. This is a hard jab under his chin.

If that stroke should miss or be ineffective, the next stroke is aimed straight at his face or eye, keeping in continuous motion.

If the man is still in action, the umbrella keeps moving, the point slashing down across his face, the handle slamming against his jaw.

For a coup de grace, if needed, the umbrella is held horizontally and slammed hard up under his jaw or against his Adam's apple.

WAIST HOLD



The girl has been seized around the waist from behind, her arms free. First of her moves is to drive her heel down on his toes.

To break his hand grip she doubles her fist and strikes with all her might at the thinly covered bones and tendons on back of his hand.



Another "break" for this grip is to grasp the little finger of his top hand and pull it back hard – breaking it if nothing less will stop him.

Such treatment of the little finger is excruciatingly painful, more than most men can stand. Another move is a quick butt of the head.

MATCHBOX DEFENSE



A matchbox, compact or any similar inconspicuous object makes a women's fist a powerful weapon of surprise against a gun threat.

With the matchbox held in the hand opposite her opponent and making no backswing to warn him the girl is ready for action.



With a rising swing, putting her whole body into it, the girl crashes the side of her fist against gun man's jaw, between ear and chin.

At the same time (but shown here as a separate action) her left hand swings back, striking the gun away from her as she seizes and holds it.

ⁱ Source: The New York Times Magazine, September 27th 1942. pp21-22