



The Spirit of the Stick in BANDO

The Bando students of today share in the traditions of the ancient tribes when they choose their Bando stick. They do not go to the neighborhood martial arts supply store to purchase their weapons for this Burmese art. No, they pick from nature: a select species of wood known for its strength, flexibility and reliability.

By Drs. Alex &
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This reverse power strike to the legs comes in so fast and low that it is very difficult to block.



"For human-kind the trees—their roots in the ground, their heads reaching into the sky — have seemed always to bind together the universe."

— George Wald

The Bando practitioner followed his instructor up the wooded hill. They wound their way through the thick underbrush, climbing deeper and deeper into the forest. The instructor carried a knarled and slightly crooked cane. He used it to stride skillfully through the vegetation with the power and grace of a tiger. The student broke into a sweat as he worked

to the
low
lock.

his way through the thick underbrush, trying to keep up.

At last they reached a clearing where the teacher paused. He glanced toward his student significantly. The student somehow knew that his instructor was going to communicate something important. Without words, the teacher gestured for him to inspect the forest around him. The student scanned the lush growth of trees surrounding him and felt their spiritual presence.

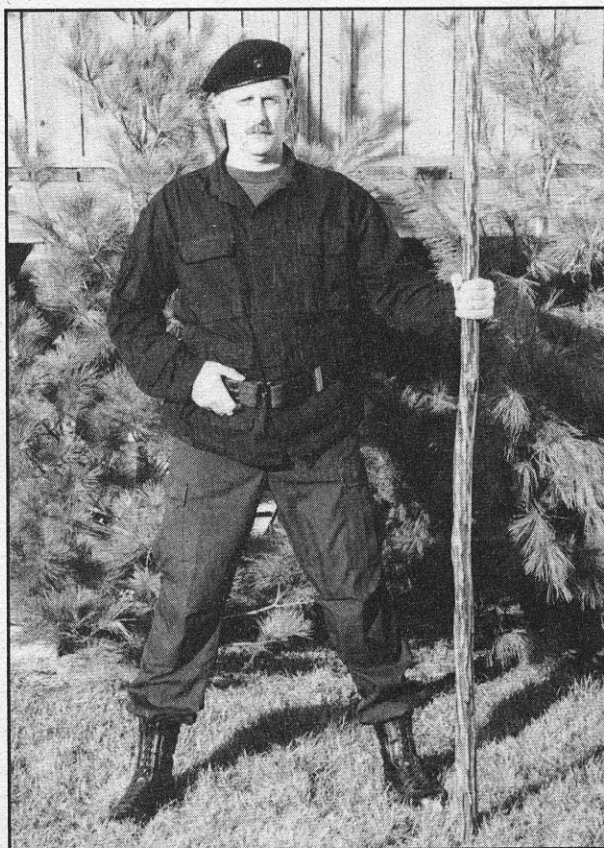
A certain long, slightly gnarled branch with a unique character seemed to call him from the surrounding trees. He began to understand the personal significance for him. The moment had come. He had just chosen his first Bando weapon.

From the Past

The ancient Burmese were a rugged people. They lived in the jungle and the mountains, among the trees and animals. They experienced the beauty and ferocity of nature every day.

Long before the influences of Christianity and Buddhism, these early people had their own religion, Animism, the belief that everything in their world had spirit. Trees, for ex-

ample, were not objects, but living beings with spirit, the symbol of nature. The tree contained one of the most important spirits because it was a provider of life. Without trees, countries cannot thrive, civilizations cannot flourish.



The Tiger Stick, made of Ironwood, retains the bark and the natural curves from the original branch.

Throughout the history of culture, homage has been paid to the tree. Christianity speaks of the "staff of life." Our deck of cards, deriving from the ancient Tarot, includes the clubs.

To the Burmese, the choice of a stick held central significance to life itself. In the old days, grandfather would say when it was time to go to

the woods to find the perfect stick. When they cut a branch from a tree it was believed necessary to reinject their spirit into the tree so that it would not die. Then they would infuse their spirit into the stick to make it alive. The stick could then become part of the person, the lifeblood of survival to these ancient people as an intimate

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part of their daily life. The qualities it had been given were retained and then passed down through the generations.

The American Bando Association has continued this ancient tradition in their modern stick arts. To call this Bando weapon a "stick" is probably as misnomer, because the Bando stick looks more natural, as if it is still a living part of the tree.

From Myth to Science

Ancient myths often foreshadow modern scientific discovery. During the 20th century, scientists in India,

England and America have worked to uncover what may be poetically called "the secret life of plants." Scientist Cleve Baxter, an expert professional with the lie detector, has conducted careful experiments which began in 1966.



This thrust position is powerful and balanced.

He found that plants react and respond in a measurable way to other life-forms in their environments. He devised automated equipment including video monitoring cameras to eliminate the human influence. Baxter placed a pair of electrodes on the leaf of a plant and set up a baseline just as he does with human subjects in his

work with the federal government and law enforcement agencies.

Once everything was set to go, he left the laboratory. A timer regulated the process.

In one experiment, heat applied to a tank of brine shrimp was placed near

the plant. Just as the water boiled the brine shrimp, extinguishing them, the polygraph registered tracings off the chart.

Based on data drawn from many such experiments, Baxter has evolved a concept that there is awareness in the plant world. Do trees have spirit? It becomes increasingly more difficult to prove that they do not.

From Tree to Weapon

Bando students of today share in the traditions of the ancient tribes when they choose their Bando stick. They do not go to the neighborhood martial arts store to purchase their weapons. No, they pick from nature: no one can improve on nature's creations.

The stick is cut from a select species of wood known for its strength, flexibility and reliability. This wood will splinter the long way rather than break into pieces, due to the long grain fibers which run through the length of the piece.

Al Cook, a proficient Bando stickman who trains the Ohio Sheriffs and special forces, says: "Other woods

like hickory, maple or oak which are commonly used in commercial martial arts weapons and police impact weapons, have very close-type wood grain or fibers. They will usually not withstand even one hit, Bando-style!"

The stick is cut to length and filed with a wood rasp around the ends. Knot holes and rough areas are smoothed, but the bark is preserved as much as possible. Then it is made even stronger with a natural resin recipe.

Function

The tribal people of northern Burma, who had very few possessions, made multiple use of every object. The stick became a central tool for many purposes, kept indoors as part of the family. Sticks were used to carry burdens, hold up their shelters, serve as part of a stretcher to carry the wounded during times of war, and for farm implements.

Sticks were also used to kill wild animals. In ancient Burma, these sticks could disable a charging elephant or horse. Natives also used these weapons for hunting. The hunters would take the animal out at the knees as it charged. Once it was down, they could finish it off with a blow to the heart.

In today's compartmentalized technological society, we often believe we must have many different gadgets for every single purpose. Our garages, which are filled with unused, non-functional objects, are testimony to this attitude. We take our culture and what it provides for granted. Yet there is much of value still in the ways of

our ancestors.

Bando's philosophy of weaponry reaches back into the mists of the past. The same physical object might have to serve in many different circumstances. The same stick could be used against unarmed opponents, multiple attackers and unarmed opponents alike.

When the attacker used a stick, the Bandoist's defense usually broke the opponent's weapon. A worthy Bando stick of today interrelates form and function much like the ancestor's. The stick will serve a number of functions.

Strong and sharp as a sword may seem, a well-tempered Bando stick can break a sword. The Bando stick used in olden times could shatter a Samurai sword into several pieces.

Long, powerful sticks were used in battle as the first line of defense, to take down the mounted opponent's elephant or horse at the knees or legs. The second line of defense fol-

lowed, using Kukri to cut down the soldiers themselves.

This was followed by the final actions. Many of the classic principles of fighting which were employed in these wars have found their way into modern society. Though their applications may have changed the concepts are still valid. Clearly, this weapon has many applications for the military and special forces in situations which require ingenuity.

Durability

One important test of a good stick is its durability. Can it shatter a brick or strong rock? Hit a tree full force without itself breaking? If the weapon shatters on impact it is useless.

Dr. Maung Gyi, Chief Instructor of the American Bando Association, has shown that many of the martial arts weapons used today are better suited to performances in the movies than in



Dr. Maung Gyi is the President of the American Bando Association.

real life-and-death combat. The Bando stick can shatter four-inch concrete blocks and show no signs of breakage!

Aesthetics

Nothing in nature is perfectly straight. Stickmen like some natural curve. The shape of the original tree is maintained as much as possible. A knob at the end can serve as a grip which feels comfortable in the hand. Nature's bends and twists add an ele-

ment of unpredictability when the stick is swung. The natural fluting is like the muscles of the forearm with knobs and gnarls that can be used to apply pain to pressure points.

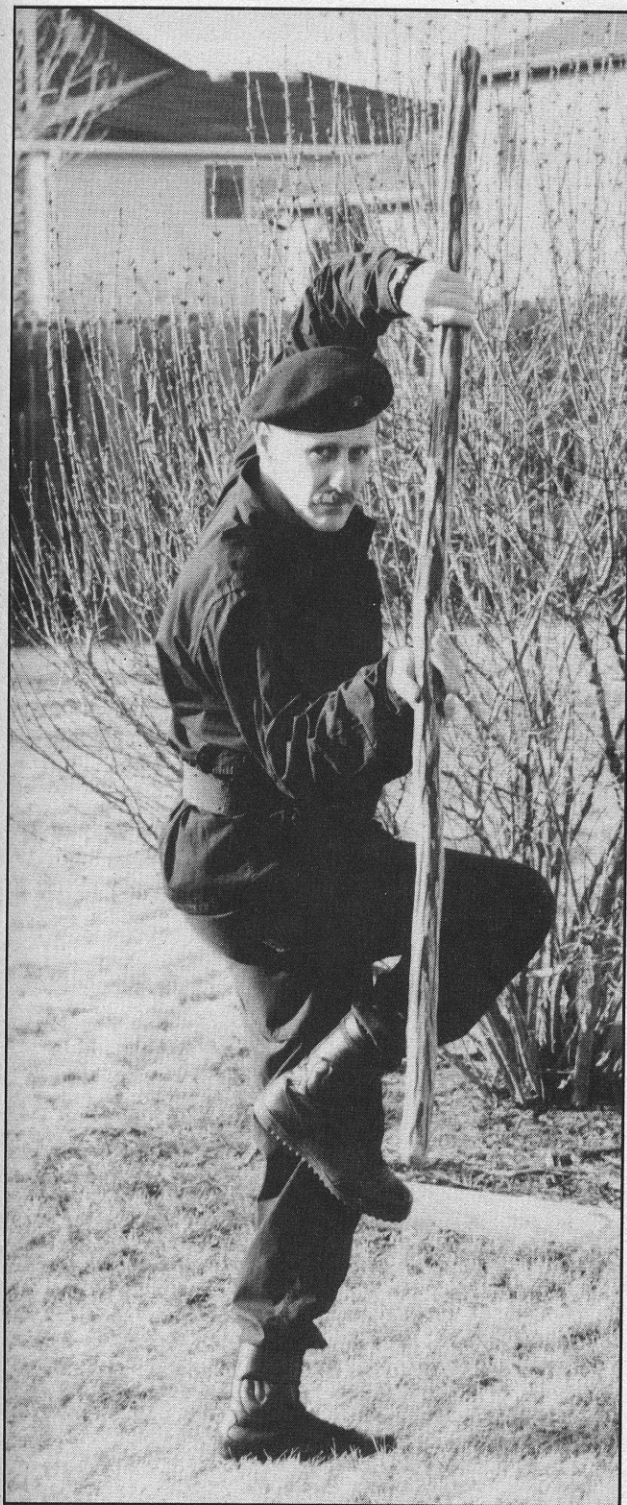
Yet, not only does the stick hold the beauty and spirit of nature, as a weapon it must look menacing. Like Roosevelt's advice, "Walk softly and carry a big stick," Bandoists believe that the ideal weapon can deter the opponent before the fight even begins. Perhaps, there will be no need to fight.

Training

Traditional Bando was developed to train warriors for actual combat. It included three branches: self-defense training (Thaing), sport combat (Bando) and armed combat (Banshay). Modern Bando, as practiced by the American Bando Association, teaches self-defense training with kickboxing in its sport aspects.

The practitioner should be advanced in the unarmed system before training with weapons. Weapons training follows, with the development of practitioners from their roots, as they branch out into one of the nine animal systems. The foundation is essential: a strong tree must have strong roots.

Training in the use of the stick in Bando is rigorous. Few manage to get beyond the first, most basic stage — hold the stick and strike a target full force. Learning to take the force generated by striking a solid object re-



The practitioner uses his leg to reinforce the stick in a block against a leg strike.

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quires long and grueling training, based in the discipline.

The density of the weapon weighs on even the strongest practitioner after many hits. Advanced practitioners like Al Cook and Ric Rossiter tell of how their hands had to withstand proper toughening to the point of numbness, to endure the tremendous force of impact, which reverberates back to the practitioner from this weapon. They trained relentlessly with correct technique until they were able to harness this force.

A reliable grip is paramount to handle the incredible force delivered to hit targets. Shock is transmitted to the the body by the heavy stick swung quickly. A strong stance draws power from the ground, as ally. The practitioner starts with softer trees, such as bamboo and banana trees, indigenous to Burma. Eventually the power is tested to break stones, bricks and concrete blocks.

Targets

Since this system emphasizes striking a target, the practitioners pay close attention to target areas. Sixty to seventy percent of the blows are aimed to the lower areas, hip and below. It may endanger the stick user himself to strike to his opponent's head, as the upper region is the most heavily guarded area. The opponent might grab the stick or find it easier to duck, dodge and evade, since this is often practiced in many martial



The long extended thrust position allows the practitioner to extend his strike.

systems.

Also, to travel the distance to strike a high target, it takes a longer time. This might give the opponent that split-second opportunity that he needs to strike back. Legs and hips are defended only with difficulty. A cracked kneecap or a dislocated hip can be quickly brought about by a skilled stick fighter. If a leg or hip bone is broken or dislocated, the fight is over.

Walking sticks can be devastating, yet unobtrusive. They touch the ground with every step, while walking. The practitioner utilizes this to develop many natural techniques. The stick form has positions with the tip of the stick on the ground. From here, the blows come up to strike from the ground, in methods basic to Bando.

The head and spine are the last targets to aim for. They have lethal potential. The joints of the arms and legs are primary targets. When struck properly, it is possible to disable rather than kill, giving the weapons practitioner a choice.

The air is not considered a great training aid. The



Overhead attacks can be deflected from this high block position.

Sticks were also used to kill wild animals. In ancient Burma, these sticks could disable a charging elephant or horse. Natives also used these weapons for hunting. The hunters would take the animal out at the knees as it charged. Once it was down, they could finish it off with a blow to the heart.

goal is to hit the target, not the air. As Dr. Gyi states, "The air is the most dangerous weapon of the enemy. If you hit the air, this means your opponent has eluded you. Your objective is to hit the target."

Imaginary target practice teaches very little of practical usefulness. Only after the practitioner can grip the stick and is skilled in holding the weapon while hitting solid objects, is some air training practiced for flow with strokes, and practice with angles of attack.

Proper form follows function. Bando is an eminently pragmatic system, which naturally extends to their



The right hand strike uses the support of the arm and the other hand to make this stroke very powerful.



The "Stick of Steel," which adds a blade to the end of the traditional six-foot stick is over eight-and-a-half-feet long.

use of weaponry as well.

Blocking

It is very difficult to block a blow which comes up from so low. The angle of the trajectory is difficult to see since it is well below eye level. These strikes quickly traverse the short distance up from the ground, which makes them more difficult to block. There are subtle sliding moves and hand changes which add to the perceptual difficulty for the defender.



This position is the "lock" done after a power cut. It can also be the start position for a thrust or a combination thrust and power cut.



The long extended thrust requires strength training to be able to control the weapon forcefully at this long-reach position.



This is a blocking position which is followed by a powerful spinning, cutting strike.

Attempts to block with the arms or legs are relatively useless. Even a trained arm will find it difficult to withstand the force delivered by a Bando stick. However, the Bando stick system has solutions in the concept of the ally. The stick can call upon force from the earth to block these lower target strikes.

Spiked into the ground, the clashing force of a hard attack may be dissipated, providing your stick is stronger than the opponent's. To endure and withstand is a primary axiom of Bando philosophy, fundamental and all-pervasive. Friends and allies help us all to endure and withstand life's inevitable difficulties, trials and challenges.

Stick Variations

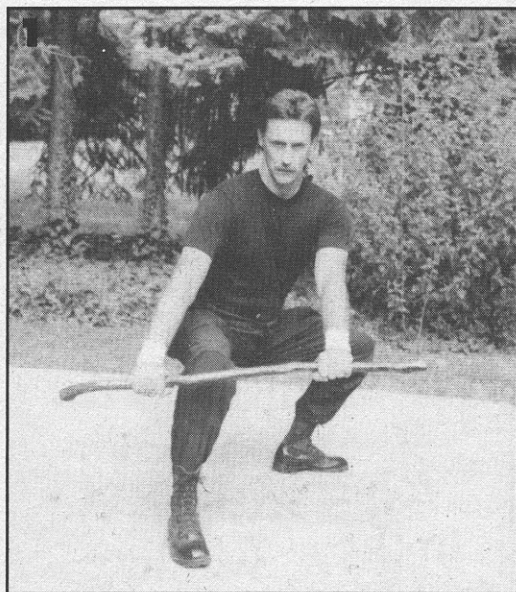
There are many variations for the Bando stick. A very short stick, called the "Wizard Wand," can be made to appear and disappear deceptively, almost like magic. The middle size, up to thirty six inches, includes batons and walking sticks. This length of stick is used by a special group of Ohio sheriffs, who train with Al Cook. According to Cook, the techniques have to be toned down and expressed with restraint to be appropriate for professional use in the streets. The long sticks can be six feet or longer. These require incredible strength and endurance to use properly.

The same stick could be used against unarmed opponents, multiple attackers and unarmed opponents alike. When the attacker used a stick, the Bandoist's defense usually broke the opponent's weapon. A worthy Bando stick of today interrelates form and function much like the ancestor's.

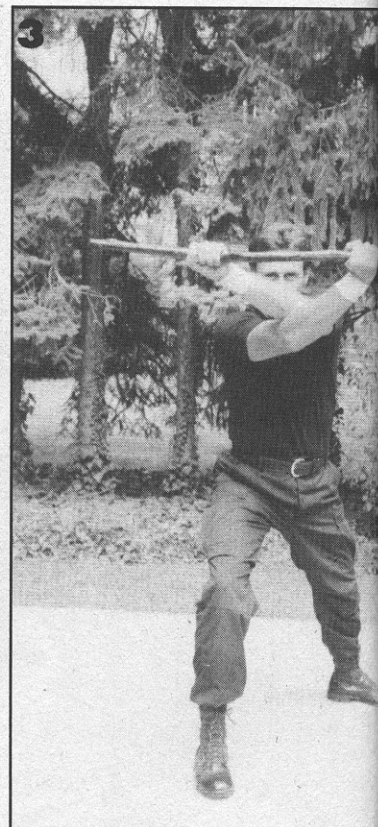
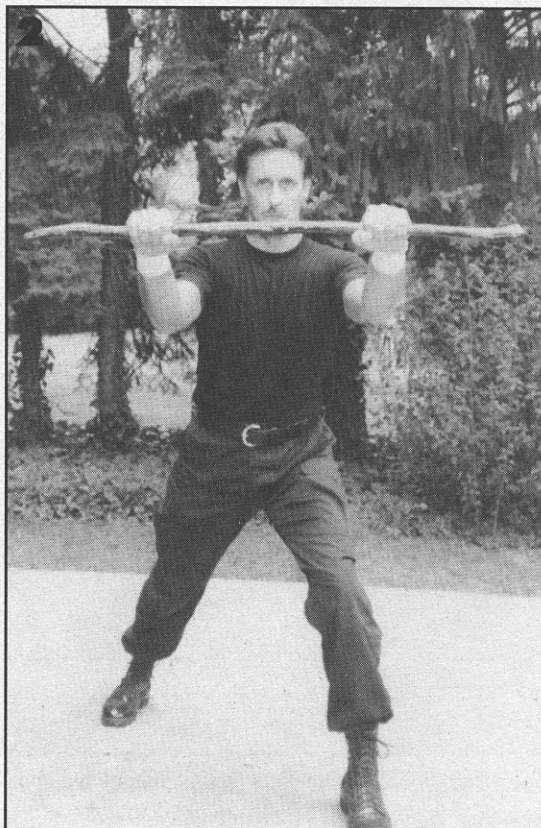
Sticks are combined with blades to make them even more deadly. The "Stick of Steel" is six-and-a-half-feet long, with a sharp Dah sword embedded within and reinforced with leather straps. The Stick of Steel can extend to over eight-and-a-half feet. The blade's devastating sweeping slashes generate enough momentum to cut a man in two!

Initial training with these sticks can be very dangerous. Novices may lose their grip during a swing and then, training partner, beware!

Each of the nine animal systems in



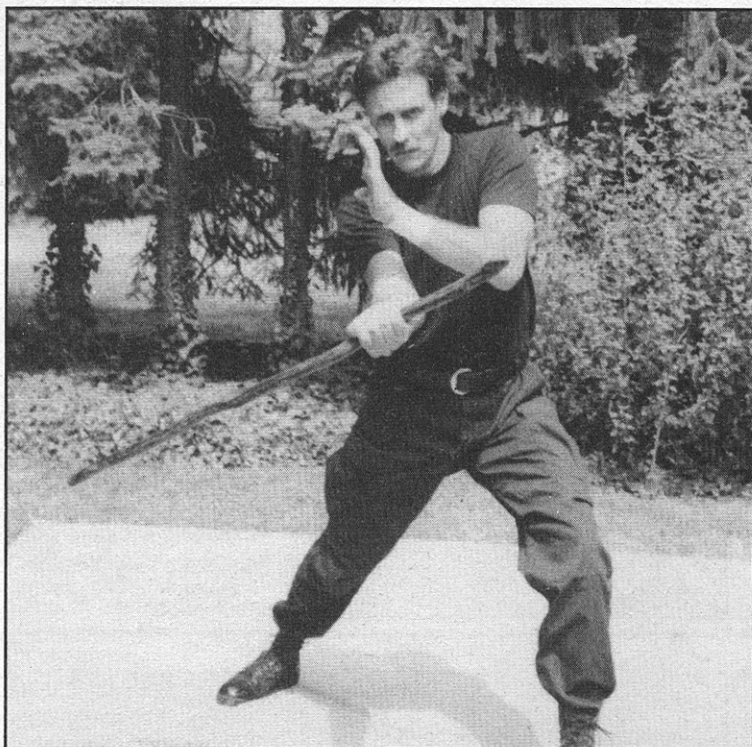
The short stick is shown protecting lower (1), middle (2), and upper range targets (3). Notice how the practitioner is always balanced in a stable stance and the stick is reinforced with two hands to take the impact.



This position is reinforced to endure and withstand.




Bando has its own form of stick, which expresses qualities appropriate to the animal. The Boar system has developed a spear stick, similar to one used to hunt wild boars. The Python system has an ingenious baton with a sturdy vine

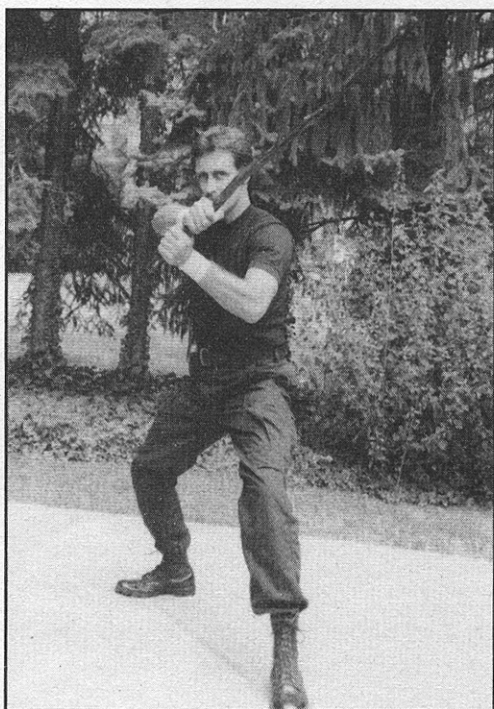


A lower slashing attack or block from below.

attached. This is used with snake-like maneuvers to tie up and entrap the opponent, bringing him quickly into submission. The Cobra style's stick has a springy, whip-like quality with a sharp end that can also be used to puncture the skin.

Conclusion

Modern civilization separates us from our oneness with nature, even as it shelters and protects. When we reach an impasse in our journey through the urban jungle, strength and renewal may still be drawn from spiritual wellsprings. The Bando Stick System seeks to link with nature through its symbols for inspiration, form and function. 



This upper target position could be used as a block or followed through for a strike.

One important test of a good stick is its durability. Can it shatter a brick or strong rock? Hit a tree full force without itself breaking? Dr. Maung Gyi, Chief Instructor of the American Bando Association, has shown that many of the martial arts weapons used today are better suited to performances in the movies than in real life-and-death combat. The Bando stick can shatter four-inch concrete blocks and show no signs of breakage!