

BOWIES COLDSTEEL

by John Styers

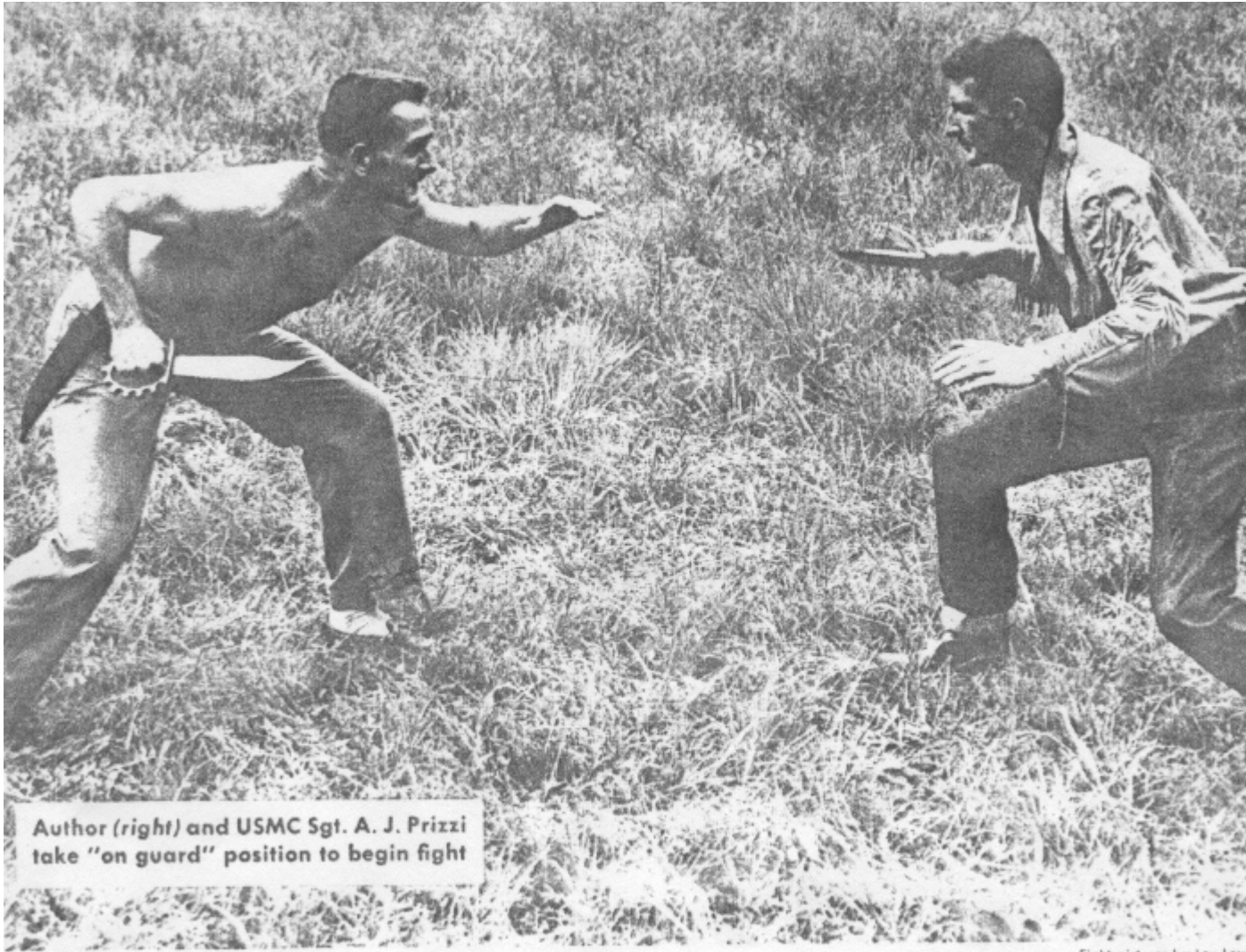
America's deadliest knife-fighting tradition adds a new weapon to the arsenal of the Marine Corps.



Expert Styers is on staff of USMC *Leatherneck*, spends most of his time teaching close combat

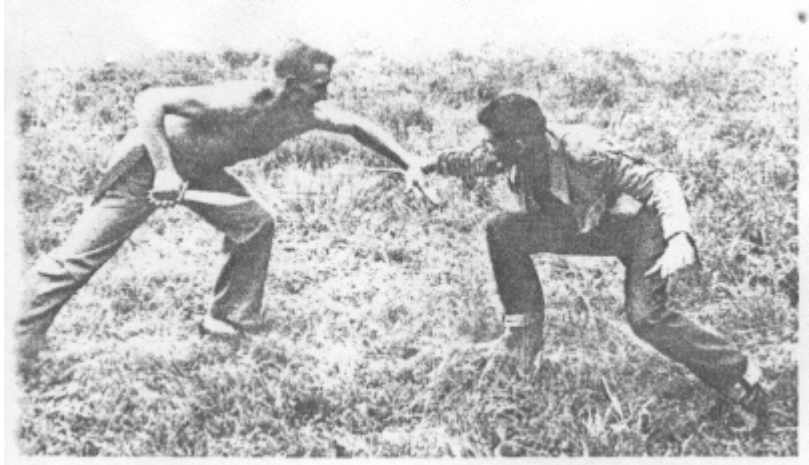


Foe makes wild, sweeping slash at head. Styers parries.



Author (right) and USMC Sgt. A. J. Prizzi take "on guard" position to begin fight

Fight pictures by Lou Low



Styers swiftly feints for knee, forces enemy to block.



Disengaging quickly, he draws first blood on left arm.



Marines at Camp LeJeune pair off to practice knife-fighting techniques. Note protection offered by masks, gloves.

Official USMC



Using his knife in action will give this Marine confidence to back up his technique



Official USM

Styers directs hand-picked unit of Marines who are slated to be instructors in close combat. Aggressiveness is as important as

Every man has an instinctive fear of a cold, sharp-edged steel blade. It's the same fear which is associated with the bite of a deadly snake. In the hands of one who would use it against you, it is a formidable enemy, in yours, it becomes a friend and an ally. Its range is short, but within that range it is a masterpiece of destruction, needs no ammunition, and cannot fail mechanically.

Despite the development of powerful mechanical devices of warfare, lasting victory is still won by the individual foot soldier who must move in, face his enemy and defeat him. The

Korean conflict has proved this fact again and again. Cold steel is still on language the enemy can understand. Recognizing this, the U.S. Marine Corps has modified the knife invented by Jim Bowie and has taught its use to the men of its efficient combat force.

Because the knife is an indispensable tool, it is only natural to assume that it has also been man's most valued sidearm for many centuries. Since there are well over 200 types of knives, with countless variations of each, suppose we take a brief look at just a few of the more important ones.

Many styles of knife fighting evolved from the manner in which the blade was used industrially. This is particularly true of the chopper, or jungle-knife type, such as the Philippine bolo or the Malayan parang. These people have a natural sense of timing, so very important in fighting with blades. These fighters wield their blades in diagonal downward swings. Thrusting is also resorted to, but only as a secondary attack.

The techniques of the Latins are very different in origin. Highly temperamental of nature, their usual intent was not to kill, but to slash their opponents enough to end the dispute. The fact that they were predominantly fishermen, all having to work together, probably accounted for the emphasis on the less deadly areas. Vital targets were also well known, however. All carried small, readily accessible knives which were used for cleaning fish. As far as technique is concerned, few Latins realize that, with slight variations, they all use principles of ancient sword-and-cloak play: the left arm protected by two turns of the cloak for parrying, left foot forward, the knife in the right hand, thumb flat on the blade.

The Turks and Arabs use their curved knife, the jambiya, in very much the same manner as their forefathers wielded the famed scimitar - that is, slicing at large muscle areas, particularly the abdomen. To disembowel is most satisfactory.

The Russians, Germans and Poles are not quite so delicate with their blades. Their knives all variations of the Caucasian kindjai, are broad, double-edged, needle-pointed, dagger-like affairs. Their design and the way they are used might reflect the temperament of the people who use them - not easily aroused, but when they are, watch out! Their dueling techniques are simple. They merely get inside the opponent's guard and drive the blade down into his chest or back. This is done with a flying leap and downward stabbing motion.

In our own country the knife has had a relatively short but glorious career.

And today our traditional techniques, combined with the best of foreign methods, are being applied at the 2nd Marine Division Close Combat School for Instructors at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. The men on this page, and other to follow them, return to their organizations and put their skill to use in training personnel for war. In addition to knife fighting, the men at LeJeune are trained in a new, simple and effective technique for bayonet fighting, unarmed combat and stick fighting.

Our knife-fighting history began in the early 1800s, with the opening of the West. In those times, the only sidearms a man had were his big, single-shot muzzle-loading pistol and his knife. The frontiersmen were of all nationalities and no particular technique prevailed. About the only sign of uniformity was that most preferred the long, pointed, double-edged "Arkansas Toothpick," looking about as deadly as a knife can look.

The Toothpick dominated the American scene in an unspectacular manner until one day in early 1831. It was a day that set off what was probably the shortest, yet deadliest, era of knife

fighting the world has ever known. Its initiator was one James Bowie, Big Jim, creator of the famed Bowie knife. That day, Bowie with his new, and as yet untested, blade faced three men on a highway - three men with knives in hand waiting to kill him. They attacked. Moments later, the fight was over and three desperados lay dead on the road, all victims of Bowie's new knife.

Within a year, Bowie became the most familiar name in the United States. Bowie put his blade to use many times after that, always successfully, and according to historians, always in defense of right, never to further his own ambitions. People all over the country were calling for a knife like Bowie's. American blacksmiths and cutlers couldn't keep up with the demand, so many were imported from England. Countless variations of the original appeared in shops and were hanging by men's sides throughout the country. Non of these ever matched the deadly efficiency of the original. The reason for this is quite simple.

The knife that Bowie had made was designed fro one express purpose - to kill. And yet, to the unskilled, it did not look as deadly as a needle-like Toothpick. The man-killing secrets held by the Bowie blade and so ably proven by Bowie himself, was not only in the shape of the blade but in the manner in which it was to be used. The blade was designed to obtain maximum effect from a specific technique. Technique was not built around the blade. Every feature in design that the Bowie possessed had an important and indispensable part to play. in making it the deadliest blade in the world, it was necessary to be skilled in technique, making use of all its features. The fact that it became known as "the knife that cuts two ways" was a result of one of the many facets of his technique. Any blade sharp on both sides will cut two ways if slashed forward and backward. Bowie's knife could cut both ways with one stroke - provided you knew how to do it. It was Bowie's technique that originated the design of the blade, and schools opened up throughout the Southwest to teach it to others.

On March 6th, 1836, only five years after Bowie and his blade began as an inseparable team, they died together at the Alamo. The last of some 183 martyrs of the fight for Texas' independence.

To the very last, the combination of Bowie and his knife proved to the world that the homage paid him was justified. He was found dead in his sick bed, run through many times with bayonets. Around his bed sprawled nine dead soldiers and one bloody Bowie knife.

In the pictures accompanying this article, the writer and Sgt. A.J. Prizzi, USMC, have simulated a duel to display some Bowie knife techniques in operation against a Mexican Bowie. The technique for the Mexican Bowie knife was quite different for it had a brass knuckle-guard to stop an opponent's blade, not to crack his jaws. It is used in a variation of the traditional Latin technique as follows: left foot forward, left arm out to parry and block, blade arm well back. The author, in buckskin blouse, is using a small, 7-inch-blade version of the Bowie.

When preparing for combat, the average American soldier must make a great transition from his normal, relatively carefree way of life to the cold reality of the battle-field. Training in close combat will increase his self-confidence, give him a more aggressive mental attitude and help to dispel the fear of the unknown.

Concerning the U.S. Marine Corps and the individual Marine, I should like to quote from the foreword of Cold Steel.

"He is part of a team, trained to do his job in a coldly calculated war of scientific weapons and mass destruction. But the touted push-button warfare has limitations, and they demand the individual's ability to meet his enemy face to face, steel to steel, hand to hand. Whether he is a radar operator, a communications man or a truck driver, he must be prepared to defend his own life in any eventuality. Close combat has been skillfully developed into a science of self-preservation - and the advance of death-dealing devices does not preclude the necessity for a basic knowledge of hand-to-hand principles and confidence in their application."

THE END

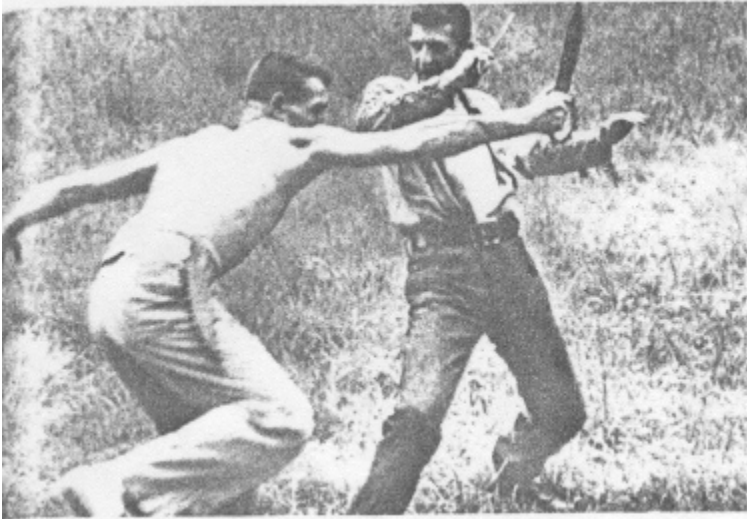
Note: credit goes to Mr. Dennis Martin, of CQB Services, for sharing this article from his collection of rare close combat related material.

This article originally appeared in SAGA magazine, December 1952.





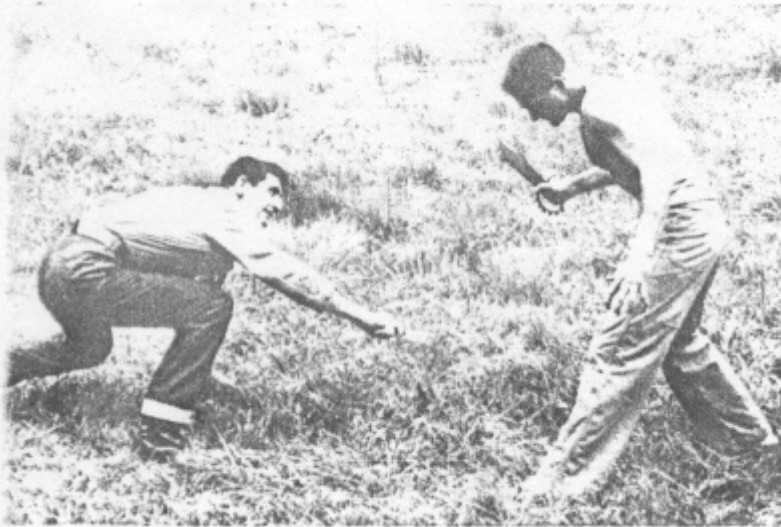
Hurt and angry, foe withdraws before launching all-out . . .



attack which Styers avoids by pivoting. He ignores . . .



chance for cut, instead reverses position for new move.



Threat to leg can be feint or actual cut if foe delays.



Prizzi's guard drops, sets him up for cut on forehead.



whips downward for disarming wrist cut. Fight has ended



Styers' slash is non-fatal but blinds opponent, then . . .