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The Telescopic Baton
Law Enforcement's New Magic Wand

Police departments are always looking for an edge. And this time they think they've found it in the telescopic baton.

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Introducing police and security departments to Oriental martial arts technology is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is rewarding to train those who have the greatest opportunity to use the arts for the good of society by saving lives and ensuring our safety. On the flip side, though, is the belief that most of these individuals are not likely to practice your methods for long after the closing session of training. This is less a reflection of individual interest and more one of occupational necessity, paradoxical as that may sound. Additionally, there is a certain mistrust of karate, kung-fu, and other stylists among law enforcement personnel which stems from street types who pretend to be knowledgeable of these arts, as well as from movies which portray practitioners as cultish fanatics who may speak and dress strangely. It is hard to blame the police for this skepticism of the benefits of martial arts. Studying the arts may also seem intimidating to these individuals, many of whom have precious little time to study something they might feel is necessary.

I have been involved in training the law enforcement community in the Connecticut area for more than 12 years, in everything from come-along holds, through speed-cuffing to PR-24 (tonfa) and straight baton deployment. The neverending search in law enforcement technology is to have high tech (never let other agencies best you in the hardware department), have it cost as little as possible, and then train the individual officer in its use in less than a day, whenever possible.

Until just a few years ago, modern technology didn't offer much to law enforcers in the area of impact weapons. Indeed, there was an array of high-tech, two-way radios, firearms, computers and motor vehicles, but the only advance in impact weaponry was simply the re-introduction of the Okinawan tonfa, or rice grinder. This was a device whose initial call to service was brought about by the invading Japanese confiscation of all swords and other

true weapons hundreds of years ago. The lowly tonfa, along with the nunchaku, sai, and other farm implements, became the mainstay of the Okinawan kareateka/farmer's defense under these conditions. Why and how the tonfa became the PR-24 and rating its effectiveness for police work is a matter for another article.

The fact is, though, police for some time have been in need of an effective impact weapon that doesn't have the drawbacks of the old "nightstick." Let's take a brief look at why a police officer might need an impact weapon in addition to his hands and service sidearm in the war on crime. The hands represent a limited level of control in numerous scenarios. Many suspects are brought in without a fist being swung or a weapon being used. This is, of course, the ideal. Once handcuffs are locked in place, almost any individual is fairly easy to control. Since many police departments either don't use or don't require the carrying of an impact weapon (nightstick, PR-24, or billy club), there is a real and dangerous gap in the area which lies between empty-hand control and the use of lethal force (handgun) by the officer. Nothing stands in the way to impede the escalation of force directly from empty hands to the lethal level.

Even in departments which carry some form of baton, it is often left behind in the cruiser during the course of making an arrest or investigating potentially dangerous incidents. Undercover officers, narcotics officers, and investigators have it worse; their usual attire prevents them from carrying such a cumbersome weapon as a PR-24 or nightstick.

Enter the telescopic baton, or extensible *keibo*. A baton constucted of steel and comprised of a handle and two telescoping tubes, it has been in wide use for some time in Japan by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and National Railroad Police. The practicality of the telescopic baton, as opposed to its fixed-position cousins, is that is may be collapsed to a six-to-nine-inch length while on the belt in a

scabbard, yet extended to its full 16-to-26-inch size with either the flick of the wrist or by depressing a lever which allows a coiled spring to extend the shafts into place. This makes the constant availability of an intermediate impact weapon an everyday reality. While imported telescopic batons remain a rather fragile and poorly constructed implement, the new generation of extensible batons now being manufactured in the U.S. by firms such as Armament Systems and Procedures of Appleton, Wis., are made of the highest grade aerospace steel alloys and industrial synthetics. Attention has been paid to keeping all surfaces smooth and snag-free. This is important for both the weapon-wielder as well as the recipient of strikes with this baton, as the officer will not have any protrusions to snag on his clothing during the draw or rough edges to cut the assailant during deployment. These particular batons are presently taking the police community by storm.

The effectiveness of this baton goes beyond it being more carriable or concealable for the police officer. Its steel tubing construction allows for more penetrating blows in less time without having to hit the head or other vital areas. This increased recovery time is due to more weight being in the handle than in the shafts, which also results in a smaller likelihood of damage to tissue on the receiving end. In tests done by the Japanese Secret Service, the telescopic baton was rated as delivering greater fluid shockwaves to the body than conventional batons, but with less physcial tissue damage. This means more control with less potential lawsuits.

Obviously, a new weapon would warrant new methods and tactics for its use. This is true and, happily for police, they may be boiled down to six simple techniques which can be learned effectively in four-to-eight hours. Primary tagets are the hands, arms, legs, and torso, and are struck with snapping, thrusting, and slashing strikes. The balance of the telescopic baton makes multiple and follow-up strikes far easier than with “dead” feeling wooden or plastic nightsticks. Penetration of effective blows through such materials as heavy leather jackets and winter coats is far more regular with the extensible steel baton because of its extreme hardness. The shockwave tends to penetrate the clothing until it finds the bone and then spreads along it in a disruptive fashion. The pain inflicted by a blow with the telescopic baton can only be compared to stubbing one’s tow sharply against a hard object while barefoot in the middle of the night . . . magnified ten times! The relative lightness of the end shaft of this weapon ensures that club-like blows which can break bones are not used and are, in fact, actually counterproductive to good technique.

The feedback which I have received after training several area departments with the ASP Tactical (telescopic) Baton and from data returning from numerous other law enforcement agencies throughout the U.S. now using the baton, indicates that it is a positive performer. It is possible that his impact weapon could bring back the popularity of batons, in general, which seems to have been lost in the last ten years.

In an incident shortly after training was completed at the Farmington, Conn., Police Department, a female officer was summoned to the scene of a public disturbance involving three unruly men. The officer tried using verbal persuasion, but when that failed, opened her telescopic baton and assumeed a ready position. When the air was penetrated by the “clack” of her 26-inch telescopic baton being opened and they saw that she meant business, the group dispersed quickly in all directions. In another incident, an officer at a university medical center had to deal with an individual in the emergency room threatening the doctors and nurses and being verbally abusive regarding a friend who was being treated. Again, a female officer was summoned. Extending her ASP baton and persuasively requesting the man’s cooperation had the effect of instantly calming him down.

Of course, not all scenarios involving the telescopic baton have taken such a non-violent turn. Occasionally, even a magic wand must be used for more than its psychological impact. Such an event was when the Farmington Police employed the ASP baton in controlling an individual whom they had just arrested for brandishing an M-16 in a local neighborhood. After using their pistols to convince him to turn over his automatic rifle, he decided to resist arrest. A swift strike to the back of the legs and a follow-up to the thigh instantly put him down.

There are numerous other case reports involving this baton, but many may never be heard because of the code of secrecy employed by the agencies using the weapon. For instance, a brief list of agencies now using the ASP Tactical Baton, furnished by Armaments Systems, reads like a who’s who of law enforcement: United States Capitol Police, FBI, Secret Service, U.S. Department of Justice, Department of the Treasury, U.S. Army Advanced Testing and Development Office, and U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Division, as well as numerous municipal, county, and state agencies.

So, should you see your local policeman carrying a small case with a black flashlight-like instrument inside, feel safe, for this is the sword of the Jedi. The new magic wand of law enforcement . . . the telescopic baton!