

With a particular interest in films of the 1940s and '50s Gary Stringer recalls Spencer Tracy's role in *Bad Day at Black Rock* and the art of self defence with an incapacitated limb.



# BAD DAY AT BLACK ROCK

(or one-armed not unarmed)

**T**hey say that inspiration can come from anywhere, and in my case, this is absolutely true. Apart from my lifelong passion for the study of martial arts I am also an avid cinema buff with a particular interest in the films of the 1940s and '50s. Film noir and other genres featuring such screen legends as Humphrey Bogart, Spencer Tracy and James Cagney *et al.* As a sub division of this cinematic interest I particularly like to collect movies which feature martial arts. If you thought martial arts in movies was a new thing, think again..

Many people may not be aware but a lot of the film stars in the '40s and '50s were quite accomplished martial artists. Peter Lorre was a third or fourth Dan Ju-Jitsu practitioner, James Cagney also trained in Judo and Ju Jitsu and there is footage in one of his movies of him training in the Kodokan in Japan.

A lot of the actors had also served during the Second World War and had practical combat experience. Lee Marvin was a marine and saw action in the Pacific campaign for example, and Richard Todd was a paratrooper landing behind German lines on D-Day 1944. It was whilst I was enjoying one of my favourite old movies, *A Bad Day at Black Rock*, featuring Spencer Tracy as

a one armed marine veteran looking into the mysterious death of his friend that my thoughts were triggered. In one scene Tracy is in the local bar when a couple of heavies attempt to 'dissuade' him from asking further questions. They are dispatched by Tracy using a combination of Tai Sabaki (Body Movement) and vital point striking, obviously choreographed for the screen; it did however, set me to thinking... and gave me the title for this article.

Although I have seen some Aikido and Ninjutsu practitioners practice single armed techniques, how many of us actually practise our fighting/self-defence techniques using only one arm? I believe that we should practise and develop or adapt some of our fighting techniques using only one arm to prepare us for the eventuality of either sustaining an injury in the initial stages of an assault, or already being injured prior to the attack taking place. Once you start to think about the mechanics of such a scenario it really can make you examine your techniques and practice methodologies.

There are many things one has to take into consideration, for example, if the injury is sustained in the initial stages of a fight then pain and the mental capacity to fight through it becomes a major factor. Whilst adrenaline will greatly reduce the initial

impact of an injury it won't completely dull the pain and you will be aware of the injury and the loss of a body weapon as will your attacker who will obviously be seeking to capitalise on his perceived advantage. Panic might become your enemy as well as pain as you realise your offensive and defensive capabilities have been reduced, even more so if the injury is to your dominant upper limb. i.e. your right arm if you are right handed.

If you are already injured prior to the assault taking place, this injured limb may well become the preferred target of your assailant, it may also be the deciding factor in his decision making processes to select you as a target in the first place. This can work to your advantage as they may well not be expecting an effective co-ordinated response. Surprise is the major advantage in any fight.

If you can only use one arm then a lot of techniques in close quarter combat become unavailable to you, in the form you may normally practice them, furthermore you don't want to be caught in too close quarters with your opponent where they may be able to grab your remaining good arm, effectively completely removing any defensive capability in that area, whilst they (the attacker) would still have one hand free to strike at will.

Mobility is always important in combat and even more so in this situation, you need to keep moving and ensure you reduce your target profile by turning side on to your attacker with your good side toward the assailant. Remember your remaining 'good' limb will have to act as both 'sword and shield', you will need to use simultaneous blocks and strikes or ensure any block is delivered as a strike in the first instance.







■ READERS SHOULD BE AWARE OF AND ADHERE TO THE LAW AS IT RELATES TO THE USE OF REASONABLE FORCE

Target selection for your counter attacks is important and should concentrate on what we term at MCSDA as the 'primary targets' which are Groin, Eyes, Neck, Throat, Shin, Knee and Instep. We use the mnemonic GENTSKI to help us remember these targets.

If you are grabbed by the clothing then ignore it, the attacker has essentially put himself on a level with you as he has committed one arm to holding onto you, however, be aware that by holding onto you, they are reducing your mobility options and keeping you in effective striking range. However, if you continue to reduce your target profile by moving to the outside of the grabbing arm you will make it more difficult for the attacker to reach you.

In extreme circumstances you must be prepared to cause injury, eye strikes and throat strikes are extremely effective and debilitating and can be delivered quickly and require little power to be effective. A good blow to the nose or an elbow strike into it will cause the eyes to water and give you valuable thinking time, a sharp kick using the shin into the groin or a knee strike to the same target if you are pulled in close can be a fight ender. Low line kicks to the shin and knee can inhibit an attacker's mobility and a good heel stomp to the instep can break the bones in the top of the foot, slowing an attacker down. Every contact should cause the attacker pain, this will confuse him and slow down his thinking processes giving you



another opportunity to strike again. Try to utilise 'strike chains' to maximise your attacks, so a finger jab could be followed by a palm heel strike which could be followed by a forearm strike or an elbow for example. 'top and bottoming' is a good tactic, that is striking high and then low, so maybe a finger jab to the eyes followed by a low line side kick to the shin. My good friend of many years Master Dave Turton says that every attacker has 'eyeballs and low balls', attack both! Surprise, aggression and speed are vital to your success.

If you do manage to immobilise one of your attacker's arms, chances are it's going to be by way of an arm wrap of some sort using your body as a brace and clamping the elbow

or arm with your good arm. Again be aware of your own position and vulnerability, move sideways on and deliver a strike to a major target area and disengage as quickly as you can.

There is a very strong natural disadvantage to only having one arm available. (For example, your adversary will be well aware that any high line strike will come from your useable arm.) Your balance will be disrupted both physically and mentally, but, martial arts practice is all about learning to overcome disadvantages, improvisation and adaptation. Your advantage will be that as a practising martial artist you will use your body as a single unit, you will move more fluidly than an attacker with no training and utilise your body weapons in effective sequences as opposed to an untrained person who will tend to operate as if their limbs are each a separate entity.

One armed practice will enhance your awareness of positioning, timing and distancing as well as challenging you to think outside the box in order to make your techniques work.

Fighting one armed is never going to be pretty or technically perfect but it's a skill that should at least be practised now and again in order to gain a little experience to fall back on should the *Bad Day at Black Rock* scenario ever arise.

■ GARY STRINGER