

Evolution of the Gun Fu Manual

This responds to visitor questions and inquiries regarding evolution of the Gun Fu Manual. Specifically, we have been asked about its roots, history, evolution, design, intent, and objective.

Rather than leaving these important questions unanswered, we felt it best to provide this glimpse into the history of the Gun Fu Manual.

I entered martial arts in the 1960's. It seems like a dream today, but back then, there were no more than a handful of qualified teaching Black Belts in any metropolitan area. Whatever the style taught, the perspective was distinctively traditional. The teacher's word ruled, deviations were not tolerated. Emphasis was on basic tools (striking, blocking, kicking, throwing, sweeping, and grappling). Testing required a demonstration of ability to execute basic tools convincingly. Wide variations existed in testing requirements from system to system, school to school, even from teacher to teacher.

In the course of my travels and experiences, I had opportunity to learn several systems, and to work with teachers of considerable distinction. My first exposure to systems providing clear testing guidelines were Kenpo (particularly Master Ed Parker's American Kenpo), and Hapkido. As these systems evolved, very specific road maps were introduced, detailing lists of techniques and applications required for each level of testing. Understand, other styles also had formal criteria, and guidelines. These systems provided precise paths leading from novice to expert. At any point in time, a student could identify where he or she stood on the road map, and what had to be accomplished to progress further.

As the Ironcrane school formed in the early 1980's, many of its original students tested under requirements inspired largely by the structure of Hapkido, also paying due respect to the organization of technique in Kenpo particularly the Sampai school.

At approximately the same time, and throughout the decade of the 1980's, I worked extensively with Master Archibeque. His philosophy and teachings caused me to initiate major reassessment of our own approach in practicing and teaching the arts.

Continuing our course of creating standards, we also committed to respect the following guiding principles (reflecting the influence of my earlier teachers):

1. The Ironcrane system would be philosophy driven, recognizing ultimate victory meant victory over self and those aspects of self which impeded personal growth and evolution in life;
2. Our art would embrace commitment to Truth, awareness, and social justice;
3. The manifestation of our art would be total self defense, and ability to interface confidently with reality based upon a clearly stated mission and goal;
4. Ironcrane Gun Fu would incorporate underlying archetypal concepts which provided a universal foundation for each and every student to develop their own style and system of personal

technique;

5. Promotions at all levels would require a test of skill;
6. Rather than requiring specific technique, tests would be based upon situational challenges requiring personal solutions. In effect, a performance standard would be established, and how the standard was satisfied would be your decision. To pass, you would provide a convincing display of your skills and knowledge.

In the early days, Black Belts of other systems often attached to the Archibeque Gun Fu school in Olympia, or to Ironcrane in Tacoma. The influx of new techniques and concepts was quite significant, and the approach to new knowledge inspired by the teachings of Master Archibeque was to examine everything, determine what was useful, and reject what was not. Again the practice was to “find the style within the person” and provide an archetypical foundation maximizing what already existed.

It must be remembered the Manual is nothing more than a bare bones outline of each person’s expected skills. As each student achieves mastery, and is promoted to Black Belt, they are encouraged to continue their growth independently. Many students will reflect with some degree of privation how, just when they expected to acquire the status of esteemed Senseis, they were summarily terminated from the class and told to “go grow elsewhere”. In short, the system requires you self actualize...even to the extent of giving you the needed boot in the rear when necessary.

The initial section of the Gun Fu Manual addresses the underlying nature of the art, “Gun Fu is a living entity and possesses its own spirit, its own heart, its own body, and its own mind...”

At the time of the Manual’s first inception, we had been researching materials on the evolution of organizations, particularly the interplay of members and leaders. Considerable inspiration came from the creative interplay among respective members of the Beatles (as in John, Paul, Ringo and George). The general theme of spirit, heart, body and mind emerged as integral attributes fundamental to the notion of creativity within an organization. In the Beatles, these roles are symbolically fulfilled by George Harrison (spirit), Paul Mc Cartney (heart), Ringo Starr (body), and John Lennon (mind). The Gun Fu Manual begins with those concepts, reinforcing how the organization, through its members, is a living entity, capable of creativity, evolution and growth.

The Mission and Goal of Gun Fu are distilled to their most succinct form. Typically, in a test, a student will be challenged on all concepts, and effectively will have to prove, at each level, their understanding has continued to grow and evolve. As growth occurs over the course of years, a student’s understanding of these basic concepts becomes profound and integrates completely into the student’s life. Remember the goal of Gun Fu is “Mind over matter.” There is no shortcut!

Moving forward in the Manual there are the sections on Stances, Hand Tools, and Foot Tools.

I don’t know that anyone has ever counted the number of strikes or kicks we use, it’s a big number and continues to grow as new techniques emerge. For testing, the list of hand tools

numbers 31 in total. This is only a subset of what an average Black Belt can produce...and should be considered a starting point rather than final destination. These hand techniques also cross connect to the techniques existent in other styles basically connecting what it taught in Gun Fu to the other arts. The same comments apply to the Foot tools, and the myriad optional and multiple kicks.

As a general rule, the Ironcrane school is hand oriented (there are some exceptions depending on student inclinations). Decisions are always having to be made as to what constitutes the most efficient use of one's personal time in developing skills. For example, doing a combination front, side, and spin kick while airborne is quite impressive and develops tremendous physical agility and stamina. What must be addressed is whether this fits into one's own concept of self defense, and if the time and energy demanded to master the application can be better spent elsewhere. There is always a give and take in the martial arts. What goes to one is taken from the other. At Ironcrane Dojo, each student is made closely aware of decisions that must be made at every stage to ensure proper development of a personal fighting system.

Early in one's study at the Ironcrane Dojo, there is exposure to the Cardinal Points. These are in fact inspired by the writings of Joseph Campbell, and according to some sources, were similarly adopted from Campbell's writings into the Star Wars mythology. Our objective here is not to expound on the topic, just to point to the source. You can explore more if you so choose.

As basics are acquired, there is exposure to breathing techniques, and various breathing techniques are outlined in the Manual. Within Ironcrane Dojo, breathing techniques and archetypical movement can be pursued as separate studies, taking years. Again, it's what each student requires to refine and develop their own style and what their energies and limitations allow. Regardless of how far a student takes breathing and deliberate movement of energy, a basic mastery is required as part of the archetypical platform.

The substantive portion of the Manual deals with Self Defense techniques. A student of Ironcrane should be able to defend him or herself in any situation. The techniques have been categorized to reflect the most common self defense problems which might be encountered in real world situations. For testing purposes, students are required to produce a minimum number of timely responses to each category of attack. They are not told what response is required...that is left to each student's personal inclination and instinct. In actual testing, the Self Defense criteria is met only when the sequence is run to completion and the attacker is unable to continue.

Many of our Hapkido friends comment on the similarity of the Self Defense standard and what exists in Hapkido. Yes and No...our approach is different. For each situation, a typical student of Ironcrane will have been exposed to dozens of techniques and responses. Over the course of teaching for several decades, it became clear that each student, for reasons not always clear or certain, gravitated toward certain pathways of response against each incoming attack. By the early 1980's, it was obvious to myself as a teacher that requiring a technique which was inconsistent with a student's personal inclinations, resulted in suboptimal performance. To address that issue, we established the concept of presenting as many variations of responses as possible to each situation, then identifying where the student's inclinations began to take root. Once those points were identified, it was an easy matter working the concept into the student's instinctive response, reducing delay in response time to minimum. At the end of the day a

student's self defense should be completely instinctive, and that is what is expected at Black Belt.

The considerable influence of Master Archibeque on our teachings came in the form categorical concept. Master Archibeque is the inspiration for the theme *Body of Steel*. The concept of *Impeccable attitude* can be found in many world legends, and in modern literature continues to resurface (check out *The Teachings of Don Juan* by Carlos Castenada). Master Archibeque also inspired the principle of *Truth becoming the Heart of Gun Fu*, what works works, what doesn't doesn't. My own influence in the foundation themes attaches directly to the importance of Kata and technique in personal development, as the *Mind of Gun Fu*.

Again Master Archibeque's great contribution to all martial arts is his promulgation that all technique falls into thematic categories that do not have to be spelled out as specific technique...rather they are better understood as underlying concepts which propel the actual technique. Because of his background and history, Master Archibeque looked to nature and tradition for appropriate terminology to categorize the symbolic distinctions between these underlying principles. That inspired the animal fighting styles. All students of Ironcrane Gun Fu are expected to master the concept of animal fighting. At any point in time, they should be able to explain any of the major animal applications, providing examples of the underlying principle, reflected through their personal technique. In the early 1980's, there were over 30 conceptual categories, each one so completely unique, that when revealed through one's personal motion, had the potential to become an entirely new style.

To his credit, Master Archibeque continued to expound his theories, and the animal concepts have grown significantly in number. Our requirements for testing go to the original cluster of animals, which represent the most dominant influences in actual movement and technique.

Early on, I integrated the original Manual into the Ironcrane Dojo as a formal learning tool and standard. Several years passed, when the benefits of a guiding path were proving to pay dividends for our dojo. We were asked by Gary Foreman, then chief administrator for Master Archibeque, if the Manual could be incorporated, in like fashion, as a guide for the Olympia home school. This of course recognized our own efforts in developing the Manual, and furthermore, ensured a consistent standard among all students and practitioners of the art. At about the same time, in the mid 1980's, other schools took interest in the Manual and we were happy to share it as appropriate (provided appropriate credit was given to its origin). Today, it is in relatively widespread use.

At the Ironcrane School, the Manual was intended to set a singular permanent standard for performance and growth. Intentionally, much is left to personal interpretation. So long as there is no deviation from the performance standard, or dilution of concept, teachers of Gun Fu are encouraged to incorporate their own awarenesses into interpreting and sharing the Manual with their students.

After the basic Manual began to achieve distribution, we incorporated a system of Appendices expanding, expounding, and fine tuning the underlying concept. Currently, there are 17 Appendices, and the Manual has become a full book.

Responding to a final point, we are often asked about our Black Belt test. Testing requirements

for all belt levels are included in the Manual, and at Ironcrane, there are generally no exceptions to testing requirements. The way to achieve rank is to pass the test. A typical Black Belt test will run for 8 hours. These tests are no less than marathons for all involved, and are as hard to give as to take. At the end of the Black Belt test, a student is absolutely confident in his or her ability to take control over their life, and to exist with confidence in any hostile situation.

Hopefully, these comments will respond to your many questions regarding the Manual, its history, and its influence on our system.

Bill Mc Cabe

