

A martial arts and self-defense textbook for average people.

**Shorthand Empty Hand**

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## ***Introduction***

When I was training in a traditional martial art, someone told me that I was “relentless” in my desire to see traditional martial arts taken seriously as combative systems. This surprised me. I don’t consider myself a traditionalist or a martial stylist in any sense of the word, nor am I particularly tied to or invested in a specific martial tradition. I do hold in high regard the things I do and the arts in which I train – but only because they *work*.



I have little patience and even less free time, so I try not to waste that time on efforts that don’t further my goals. I have, in fact, adhered to something of a short-attention-span-theater approach to the martial arts in the last decade and a half. Most of my accomplishments in this field have been, for lack of a better word, “unofficial.” I have no impressive credentials and I can provide no compelling appeals to authority in trying to persuade you to listen to me. All I can do is tell you, earnestly, what I think and why, substantiating my opinions with logic and reason. If you find value in that and in the *Shorthand Empty Hand* program, that is all that matters to me.

It is always fascinating to look at yourself from the outside. I thought about the idea of martial arts traditionalism and my relationship to it for quite some time. I’ve been accused of many things over the course of my punditry and pedantry in the martial arts field. The profoundly stupid have called me a quasi- or pseudo-intellectual. The followers of alternative combat systems have accused me of sycophantic devotion to a single WWII combatives instructor. The unskilled have called me hateful and the self-absorbed have called me arrogant. The unyielding have

called me a liar and the unfeeling have called me cold. The irrational have called me paranoid and the hoplophobic have called me afraid.

I had never before been called a *traditionalist*, however.

In the years I've written for public consumption and formal publication, I've said, read, and seen a lot. I've seen friendships born and destroyed, virtual communities rise and fall, loyalties shift, lies told, truths revealed, hatred fed, hope born and dashed, wisdom imparted, foolishness propagated, and every permutation and combination of the preceding, across a spectrum running from mild to mind-numbing.

Over that time I've received a lot of mail and read a lot of things to me and about me. Good friends with whom I've disagreed have kicked me in the teeth. Heroes and teachers I've admired have turned on me. People I've despised have surprised me and shamed me. People I didn't know existed have praised me, damned me, and asked me for advice.

There is only one constant at the center of that dizzying storm of words and war, of weakness and wealth. That, regardless of what you may hear or think, is my *honesty* – my firm conviction to approach the martial arts with objectivity and an active mind.

I throw around the terms “combatives” and “martial arts” fairly casually because I see the two as synonymous. There are those who don't. To my mind, however, engaging in combat with another human being – using *physical force* – is a science that, through diligent study and training, can be elevated to the level of art.

Exponents of pure combatives – the “Thug Fu” adherents whose members dismiss all but the most elementary of violent mechanics (on the grounds that the rest is needless complication and delusion) – are right in their thinking. They are right because they

## *Shorthand Empty Hand*

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measure what they do – and what they scorn – against the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong: *reality*.

To these men and women, the word “art” is somehow dirty. They associate it with the impractical and the unworkable. There is much ridiculousness in the martial arts community – and therefore I cannot fault combatives exponents for making such an association.

My *Webster's* desk dictionary defines *art* first as “the ability of man to arrange or adapt natural things or conditions to his own uses.” Alternatively, it calls art “skilled workmanship.” These are both, to me, the *art* of the martial arts: *skill in adapting*.

That is why I view the terms “combatives” and “martial arts” as synonymous. I dismiss the unworkable as not “martial” at all. Anything that works – anything that can be “adapted to my own uses” – is viable as a martial application. As a result I try not to dismiss anything out of hand without critical analysis, the hallmark of the active mind.

I find myself, then, standing within two spheres of thought, two martial philosophies, that sometimes intersect and sometimes do not. I measure everything I do and everything in which I train against the yardstick of reality. I find value in some traditional arts – the infighting system of Wing Chun Kung Fu, the stick- and knife-fighting of Silat, Kali, and the Filipino Martial Arts in general, some of the basic kicking techniques of Karate – and I find none in others. I modify components of my training to suit me and my pragmatic, nontraditional goals.

I am speaking of myself because I can speak for no other person. I would expect anyone reading this who seeks success in self-defense to do the same.

My publication, *The Martialist*<sup>™</sup> ([www.themartialist.com](http://www.themartialist.com)), is written “for those who fight unfairly.” So, too, is *Shorthand Empty Hand*. A *fair* fight is no fight in which I want to find myself. I'll take every advantage I can get and employ every piece of knowledge and training I can glean. I'm a pragmatist. I won't look down on any tool or piece of training if I think it can help me. I'm also a realist. I won't accept any tool or piece of training if I find it ridiculous.

I often do find benefit in traditional methods and systems. At all times, however, I integrate what I learn with practical combatives and with a baleful eye on reality's harshest limits. *Shorthand Empty Hand* is an expedient guide to stylized fighting – a simplified program of unarmed combat that integrates, interprets, and alters elements from everything I have ever studied and researched. It's not a traditional martial art. It's not the Shanliang Li martial system (a system I co-founded with my teacher David W. Pearson). It's not a purely modern gross-motor combatives program. It's one method of fighting and of doing so with style. It represents how I approach self-defense when not constrained by the demands of one style or another.

*Shorthand Empty Hand* makes the power of the martial arts and the expediency of combatives accessible to everyone, of any skill level. It is *not* representative of any individual style that I've studied. My experiences are part of me, but *Shorthand Empty Hand* is not a means of teaching what I was taught. There are no shortcuts to martial prowess – but this is the shortest path with which I can provide you. That is the meaning of the word *shorthand* in the title. This is a system anyone can learn and apply. This is a system for the everyman and the anywoman, the average citizen and the mere mortal. This is a template for those with no experience – and a simplified review for those with an abundance of it.

As you read this, please don't attempt to hold anyone but *me* responsible for what you see. My former teachers have no control

## *Shorthand Empty Hand*

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over what I've written here. They had no input as to the content of this book. I am not attempting to teach you anything they can or would teach you. I am not demonstrating for you what they have tried to teach me. Anything with which you *disagree* in this manual is *my* responsibility, my error, my mistake – and mine alone.

There will be those who disagree with the curriculum outlined in this book. There will be those who ridicule it, who attack me, and who read all manner of evils into this simple pile of bound paper. It saddens me that there are people who take me more seriously than I take myself. I won't deny that it always causes me sorrow when my willingness to tell you what I believe, to share my experiences, to dare to have my own opinions and seek my own way, causes friction with those whom I respect. Some disagree but remain silent. Others tell me honestly and respectfully what they think. Still others resent the temerity with which I presume to offer my thoughts in the field of self-defense.

In the course of my work in *The Martialist™*, I've gained and lost friends. I've listened and I've spoken. I've been surprised and unmoved, pleased and angered, happy and sad, prolific and preoccupied. I have not, however, been anyone but *me*.

Effective fighting is a function of content, not origin. *Shorthand Empty Hand* is not traditional and it is not opposed to tradition. It is not ideological save in opposition to ideologies that are self-destructive. It has only one goal: success in self-defense. It has only one audience: the average citizen.

We all share this goal: pragmatic preservation of our loved ones, ourselves, and that which we've earned through our efforts. That is why you are reading this book. That is the purpose of *Shorthand Empty Hand*.

*No adversary is ever going to just let you apply a movement or technique without opposition. To be effective, your moves must be both cunning and ferocious.*

– Geoff Thompson

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