

# U.S. Marine Corps Individual Combat Course, July 1944

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*Official USMC photograph, dated April 1943. From the National Archives and Record Administration, ARC identifier 532513. "Judo instruction is one of the high spots in the life of the latest addition to the Leatherneck Marines here [at [Montford Point](#), North Carolina]. An instructor shows a recruit how to make the enemy's bayonet useless. Cpl. Arvin Lou Ghazlo, USMC, giving judo instructions to Pvt. Ernest C. Jones, USMCR." African Americans were only allowed into the Marine Corps after 1942.*

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## INDIVIDUAL COMBAT COURSE

1. Objective: The objective of the Individual Combat Course is to develop the individual through a process of physical conditioning and individual combat to his fullest potentialities as a fighter.

2. Composition: This Individual Combat Course is composed of 5 phases:

1. Bayonet Fighting (Marine Method)
2. Knife and Club
3. Judo
4. Hip Level quick firing
5. Combat Conditioning Exercises

A 6th phase, combat swimming, is an integral part of the combat conditioning course when aquatic facilities are available.

3. Principles: Tactical Stress in this course is on attack. The doctrine of individual combat is threefold: 1) to strike from as far out as possible, 2) as quickly as possible, 3) with the best weapon available. In selecting and developing the various individual combat techniques, three conditions were required of all movements: effectiveness, speed, simplicity. The movements must be instantly disabling or killing from as far out as possible and simple enough to be mastered by competently trained troops.

4. Training: Training in this course is based on conditioning reflexes through intensive practice so that aggressiveness becomes instinctive and fighting responses become automatic and instantaneous. Average time necessary to learn the mechanics of individual combat movements is about 30 hours – bayonet, 12 hours; knife, 3 hours; club, 2 hours; hip level quick firing, 3 hours; judo 10 hours. The combat conditioning exercises can be learned quickly after a few repetitions. After the mechanics of movements have been mastered, at least that much more time in additional training must be required to develop high combat efficiency. It is important that sufficient training be continued to develop high combat effectiveness and to maintain fighting condition. To develop superior combat effectiveness, 6 to 12 hours a week of combat and conditioning should be included in troop training programs. To maintain the combat efficiency of trained troops, 3 to 6 hours a week should be allotted to combat conditioning. 3 to 6 hours a week should be allotted to combat conditioning. Afloat, especially on the way to an operation, 30 minutes or more of conditioning exercises on deck should be part of the daily program.

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5. Phases of the Individual Combat Course:

1. Bayonet Fighting: This type of bayonet fighting uses a continuous slashing attack. Recent additions to this system are night fighting and group assault tactics for combinations of two and three bayonet fighters. The recently perfected system of Marine bayonet training uses no dummies or protective equipment. The man-against-man training is designed to condition fighting reflexes and to develop maximum speed and combat timing.

2. Knife and Club: Knife and club tactics are similar in basic movements and are employed as weapons of attack. Governed by the principles of bayonet fighting, knife

and club tactics include mixed combat against club, knife, unarmed opponent, and fixed bayonet.

3. Judo: This phase includes shock dispersion, tumbling, judo and disarming. Movements have been carefully selected for effectiveness, speed and simplicity. Techniques were selected from many hand to hand combat sciences including jiu-jitsu, boxing, judo, wrestling, and savate. All are essentially assault movements.

4. Hip level quick firing: This is a method of firing quickly from hip level in close combat. First shots are fired in less than one second effective to a range of 20 yards. This type of firing is intended to supplement the standard aiming methods in close-in fighting situations where speed in getting off first shots is vital.

5. Combat conditioning exercises: This is a system of exercises new in the armed services but long used in college football training for the rapid development of agility, speed, strength, and endurance. Included are fast conditioning marches, alternately trotting and walking at the rate of 5-7 miles an hour for 1 to 2 hour periods. The faster marching rate provides more intensive conditioning and saves training time, in addition to the tactical advantage of developing troops that cover ground at exceptional speed. This conditioning provides much of the physical basis for proficiency in the various modes of individual combat.

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#### BAYONET FIGHTING (Marine Method)

The new bayonet method outlined here is not a modification of the standard Army style, but a departure based on a different foundation. Changes from the Army bayonet system have been made in blade position, stance, footwork, attack movements, and tactics.

Essence of the new method is the slashing tactics developed during the past twenty-five years by Col. A.J. Drexel Biddle, USMC. Recent additions to this system include night fighting, group assault tactics, and a system of training based on conditioning reflexes. The effect is a fast, flexible slashing attack.

This method can be taught to Marines in 10 hours. There should be at least one instructor to each platoon. Training is built up logically in the natural sequence (as listed below) of stance, footwork, parries, handcuts, throat slashes, and follow-up movements, with individual and group combat tactics.

At the outset, movements are first demonstrated and explained, then practiced individually as in shadow boxing. This is quickly followed by practice of man-against-man at reduced speed with bare blades. Precision and rhythm only are stressed at the outset. Speed and timing follow after mechanics of movements have been mastered.

This method of fighting is in accordance with the American bayonet fighting doctrine of attacking without delay and always pressing the attack. What has been added is a faster,

more versatile attack that cuts in bewildering from either flank.

Even if only 1% of our troops may ever be called upon to use the bayonet in combat, a much greater proportion of Marines are armed with a bayonet. If a man lacks confidence in his ability with this basic weapon, it constitutes a flaw in his fighting makeup.

Effectiveness and confidence with a bayonet are not intended to lead to less appreciation of fire weapons. In fact, hip-level quick fire, taught as another phase of close-in fighting, should always be used as much as possible in bayonet clashes.

Ability with the bayonet is encouraged on the principles that if a fighter armed with only a bayonet can walk with confidence a loaded rifle in his hands proportionately increases his confidence as well as his fighting potentialities. There is no reason why a corps of elite shock troops like the U.S. Marines should not have the most effective bayonet technique in the world.

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Bayonet movements and sequence of instruction:

Flat blade stance

Footwork (Steps forward, back, left, right, forward and rear pass, pivot)

Quick thrust (Intended to provide opposition for partner executing flat blade movements and as follow up movement after slashes.)

Slashes (vertical hand-cut, lateral, reverse.)

Parries (left and right)

Hand Cut – Throat Slash (with left Parry)

Double parry (left) – Hand Cut – Throat Slash.

Disengage (from left Parry) – Hand Cut – Throat Slash

Above three movements (Hand Cut, Double Parry and Disengage) done from right parry.

Downward Parry – Throat Slash

Feint Low – Slash (Left and Right)

Throw Point

Butt Strokes (Vertical, Horizontal, Smash, Rearward)

Night fighting tactics (Extremely low crouch with rifle butt close to or on deck and a minimum of movement, looking upward for opponent to be silhouetted against sky, maximum speed during attack).

Bayonet vs. Knife, vs. Club, vs. Unarmed Combat.

(Hand Cuts and throat slashes)

## Bayonet Fighting Combinations:

1 vs 2, 2 vs 1, 3 vs 2.

## Bayonet Training Method

The basic formation for demonstrating, explaining and practicing the movements will be four ranks at double arm interval, the second and third ranks about 15 paces apart, and the first and second and third and fourth ranks about three paces apart. The instructor stands in the center between the second and third ranks as illustrated.

x x x x x x x x

x x x x x x x x

(X)

x x x x x x x x

x x x x x x x x

During all demonstrations and explanations all ranks face inboard toward the instructor. Footwork is practiced by two ranks at a time, first and second, third and fourth, one pair looking and resting while the other ranks, paced by the instructor go through the footwork. In first practicing footwork troops should move at least 10 yards in any direction before changing to another direction. After proficiency has been gained in the mechanics of footwork and in balance, the distances may be shortened to less than five yards and changes of direction made faster.

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In practicing the fighting movements, the inboard ranks face outboard (on command) and pair off in ranks with the outboard ranks. In the beginning the movements are executed at half speed with a stress on precision. Inboard and outboard ranks alternate by command in practicing movements. Specific ranks are told what movements to execute and when and how long to do them. (Example "Inboard ranks face outboard, All ranks, on guard. Outboard ranks will thrust, Army style; inboard ranks will parry left, hand cut and throat slash. At will, go.")

Although no movements are done in unison, the precise movement of the ranks which do the movements, and the starting and finishing time of the movements are governed by command of the instructor. This is to preclude haphazard selection of movements. Movements are repeated with smoothness and relaxation at will, with no pause until the next instructions are given.

In this bayonet practice it is desirable that the troops be stripped to the waist. The practice session should be preferably turf. The first two practice sessions should be with bare blades, to accustom the troops to the sight and feel of cold steel. Then the scabbards

should be used to permit the troops to practice faster with a minimum of injuries. In the last two hours of training, scabbards should again be removed, so troops complete the course moving fast with bare blades.

After movements have been learned, free fighting bouts of less than thirty seconds duration should be held frequently to develop aggressiveness and combat timing. By practicing against one another, minor bruises and lacerations, mostly on hands are common. But developed in this way are fighting poise, alertness, speed and combat timing far surpassing that which could be developed in training with a passive dummy.

It is emphasized that attack distance for this method of bayonet fighting is out where the last six inches of the blade can whip lash the opponent with maximum speed and ease. Getting in closer reduces the effectiveness of the slash and increases vulnerability unnecessarily. Staying too far beyond the hitting distance hinders attack. Attack range will vary according to the size of the individual this attack distance will be about fixed bayonet length from the opponent.

Practice sessions in bayonet may range from 30 to 90 minutes, longer in the beginning, shorter later, with three to six sessions a week. No more than three new movements should be introduced at each session. However, at each sessions, all movements previously learned should be practiced, so that at the end, all movements may be done in a half hour session, in contrast to perhaps the initial 90 minute session where only the stance and footwork were practiced. The course should be covered in ten hours. Additional practice, 10 to 30 hours, will be for speed and timing.

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Movements will be repeated until they become automatic. No attempt will be made to build up sequences of movements or fixed patterns of attack. Speed, flexibility and balance will be continuously stressed. The basic attack movements will be the parry, hand cut and throat slash, with usually a quick thrust to the neck or body as follow-up. No preliminary feinting or maneuvering will be tolerated. If enemy is waiting, attack instantly. Movements and tactics will be repeated until fighting responses become instantaneous and automatic.

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KNIFE AND CLUB FIGHTING

Knife and club fighting principles are basically similar to those of bayonet. The same footwork is used with stress on balance, speed, and swift attack of nearest vulnerable points of opponent. All movements are practiced until they become reflexive.

The course in knife and club fighting can be covered in 5 hours. Additional training should be allotted for improving speed and accuracy. Knife and club are considered together because movements and tactics are similar.

Knife is taught first. For knife training, bare bayonets are used. Movements may also be practiced initially with a club about the length of a bayonet. Knife movements are practiced against a knife – armed opponent.

Club fighting is first practiced against an unarmed opponent. Later in the instruction, club movements are included against the opponents armed with knife, club, and fixed bayonet.

The club, like the knife, is to be considered an emergency weapon readily available in a pinch and very effective when properly used. For training, each man will obtain his own club. It should be about 1-inch in diameter and about the length of a bayonet. Stripping bark or finishing of the club is not necessary or desirable.

Knife movements and sequence of instruction:

Flat blade stance

Blade line (blade, wrist and forearm in one plane)

Slashes and thrusts

Parries (left and right)

Hand Cut -- Throat Slash (Left and right)

Hand grab -- stab (left and right)

Disengage -- Hand Cut -- Throat Slash (Left and right)

Circular Parry – Hand Cut

Knife vs. Club, vs. Unarmed Opponent (Hand Cuts and Throat Slashes)

Knife vs. Fixed Bayonet: Parry, slash forward hand, slash throat

Parry, seize rifle muzzle, stab

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Club movements and sequence of instruction:

Club stance

Jabs (solar plexus, throat, lower abdomen, face).

Joint Striking (Hand, wrist, elbow, shoulder, knee).

Concealed Club Hitting (Jab, hook, backhand, flick, smash).

Two handed club snap

Cross-club snare.

Club vs. Club, vs. Knife (Hand and joint striking.)

Club vs. Fixed Bayonet: (Parry, slash forward hand and elbow.)  
(Parry, seize rifle muzzle, strike neck, joints, etc.)

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JUDO

I. OBJECTIVE: The objective of training troops in judo is to develop agility and fighting instincts so that the individual will have greater fighting spirit and ability when armed.

II. COMPONENTS: Judo will include the following three components

1. Shock dispersion and tumbling
2. Judo
3. Disarming

III. TECHNIQUES: The techniques and movements comprising this system of unarmed combat are the result of careful selection and adaptation from a great number of movements in boxing wrestling, jiu jitsu, savate, and judo. They represent the best techniques for military purposes in terms of effectiveness, speed and simplicity.

IV. TRAINING: As in bayonet training, the method in unarmed combat will be to condition reflexes to react automatically in aggressive movements. Practice will be conducted without protective equipment, preferably on turf or sand. Judo and disarming will be practiced in pairs against each other, slowly at first for precision then accelerated for speed and timing.

V. SHOCK DISPERSION AND TUMBLING:

Shock dispersion (from backward and sideward falls)

Tumbling (forward, sideward, and backward)

VI. JUDO:

Principles (Balance, speed, leverage, surprise, aggressiveness, continuity of attack)

Striking methods (Judo slash, stiff fingers, heel of hand, elbow, knee, and kick)

Vulnerable points (Eyes, between eyes, temples, back of ears, under nose, base of skull, side of neck, collar bone, solar plexus, groin, base of spine, knees, shins, insteps, joints)

Principle attack blows:



Tiger Claw (eyes, face)

Judo Slash (throat, neck, temples, face, solar plexus, groin)

Chinese Kick (knees, shins, insteps)

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Parries (slashes, hooks, straight punches – left & right)

Parry follow-up (judo slash, tiger claw, Chinese kicks in fast, continuous succession)

Wrist and Arm attacks:

Outward twist of hand – left & right

Arm jerk – and elbow break – left & right

Strangulation and escapes:

Scissors strangle

Japanese strangle

Front cross strangle

Escapes (fast combination of kicking, striking, twisting, overhead toss)

VII. DISARMING:

Bayonet thrust:

Parry left, grab muzzle, strike lead elbow

Parry left, grab lead hand with both hands, twist outward

Parry right, strike muzzle upward and balance downward, twist back overhead.

Parry right, strike muzzle down, twist forward into deck.

Knife:

Parry, jerk arm, strike elbow, bend wrist

Club:

Same as for the knife, plus knee and other blows.

Note: Disarming methods are at best an expedient to be used in emergency. The best disarming methods are effective only against simple attack. They are ineffective against the weapon techniques taught in this course. Undue time should not be spent in disarming at the expense of attack training with weapons.

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