

Bokken



**Zanshin Kai Kobudo
Bokken Training Manual –
History, Applications & Kata**

by

Gary Simpson



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Gary Simpson has studied many martial arts for more than 38 years. He is ranked as Kyoshi 7th Dan with the Australian Martial Arts Association (AMAA) and the International San-Ten Karate

Association (ISKA). He is also a member of the International Society of Okinawan-Japanese Karate-Do (ISOK). He has trained and taught thousands of students both in Australia and overseas and is the author of many books, training manuals and articles.

This brief training manual on the history, applications and kata for the bokken is the result of many years of personal study.

WARNING

The techniques described in this manual can cause physical injury. When practicing, **extreme caution** should be taken not to injure yourself or any training partner or partners. The author accepts no liability whatsoever for any injury or injuries to any person or persons as a result of practicing or enacting any of the techniques described herein.

When training with any weapon in kobudo – ALWAYS ensure that the weapon is in good working order and that you are completely AWARE of your surroundings and every person in close proximity. NEVER expose or handle weapons in public. Weapon training is strictly a dojo activity.

Never teach unauthorized (non-doj) persons in the use of any weapon.

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ZANSHIN KAI KARATE DO & KOBUDO

Training for:

BOKKEN

INTRODUCING THE BOKKEN:

The bokken is a wooden sword, similar in size and shape to a katana, the long metal sword worn by samurai in feudal Japan. The more correct term for this wooden sword is bokuto.

The bokken has a handle of approximately 25 centimetres and a “blade” length of approximately 75 centimetres. A tsuba, or hand guard, separates the handle from the blade.

The art of using the bokken as a weapon of offense and defence is called kenjutsu. It should be noted that this is distinctly separate from the art known as kendo in which participants wear armour (bogu) and strike or attempt to strike each other with the split bamboo sword called a shinai.

Because the bokken is made of wood it is considered a “dead” blade. This cannot be compared to the “dull” (blunt) metal blades or the “live” (sharp) metal blades of the various katana. The metal blades are obviously used for cutting and slashing whereas the wooden striking area of the bokken is used primarily for bludgeoning to cause trauma to joints, bones and muscles.

Despite the fact that the bokken is made of wood, it can still be used with devastating effect when used properly. Indeed, the master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi (full name – Shinmen Musashi No Kami Fujiwara No Genshin) who reportedly lived between 1584 and 1645 eventually gave up using his live blades preferring instead to use a bokken to defeat his enemies. Such was his contempt for their lack of ability in combat against him.

To give some indication of Musashi's ability, he defeated his first opponent at only 13 years of age and by the time he was 29 he had engaged in 60 contests winning every one of them.

Musashi took up the bokken in an effort to prove his vast skill. However, the "handicap" of using the bokken soon became no handicap at all, such was his skill with all sword techniques – or so the stories go.

Musashi is known in Japanese folklore as "Kensei" or "sword saint." In 1643 he retired to a cave called "Reigendo" where he wrote his treatise on the art of the sword. He called it the Go Rin No Sho which translates as the Book of Five Rings. This book is not a thesis on strategy. Rather, in Musashi's own words, it is a "guide for men who want to learn strategy." Today, the Book of Five Rings is essential reading for all Japanese businessmen.

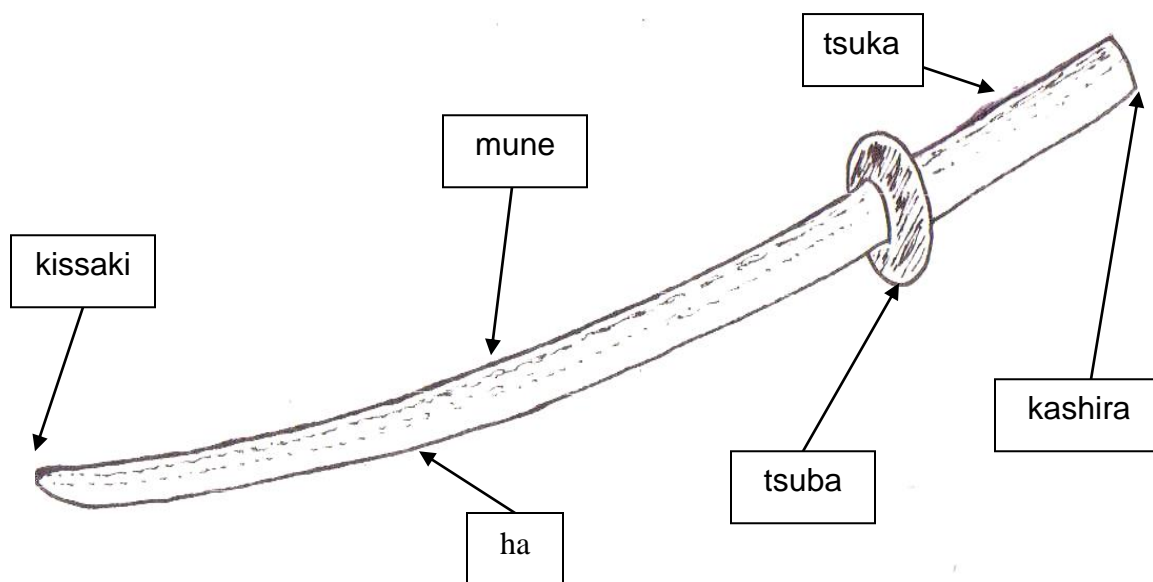


DIAGRAM OF THE MAIN PARTS OF THE BOKKEN

"The way of the sword and the way of zen are identical,
for they have the same purpose – that of killing the ego."
Yamada Jirokichi (Jikishinkage Ryu)

METHODS OF USE:

The bokken is used in a similar manner with which one would use a katana. However, unlike the katana, the bokken has no accompanying saya (scabbard) from which it needs to be unsheathed. Because it is always ready for use, there is no formal method of practicing the quick draw as in iaido.

The bokken can be used defensively to block and parry but the principal use is to hit and thrust. There is also a method of infighting using the butt end of the handle, called the kashira.

Because of its weight and balance, the bokken is wielded using both hands.

TRAINING TIPS:

When using the bokken, students should be mindful that even though it is a legitimate weapon in its own right, correct technique will prepare oneself for graduation to the katana. Therefore, by always considering it as a katana both weapons can be exchanged with little adjustment.

If the striking area of the bokken (called the "ha") becomes ragged due to the impact against other weapons during kobudo (weapons fighting) it should be sanded to prevent further splitting or personal injury.

The wood should be soaked in linseed oil at regular intervals to maintain strength. If the wood dries out completely it can shatter on impact.

Some kenjutsu practitioners have been known to cut light grooves at 90 degrees into the handle to assist with gripping the weapon.

It should be kept in mind at all times that the forward hand grip is used for power while the rear hand not only serves as a stabilizer but also as a direction finder. It could be considered that the forward hand is the motor while the rear hand is the rudder.

A light hand and finger grip will assist in rapid movement. “Soft hands” and correct angles will also allow an impact attack from another weapon to bounce off rather than being absorbed and transmitted to the hands and arms of the defender (Tori).

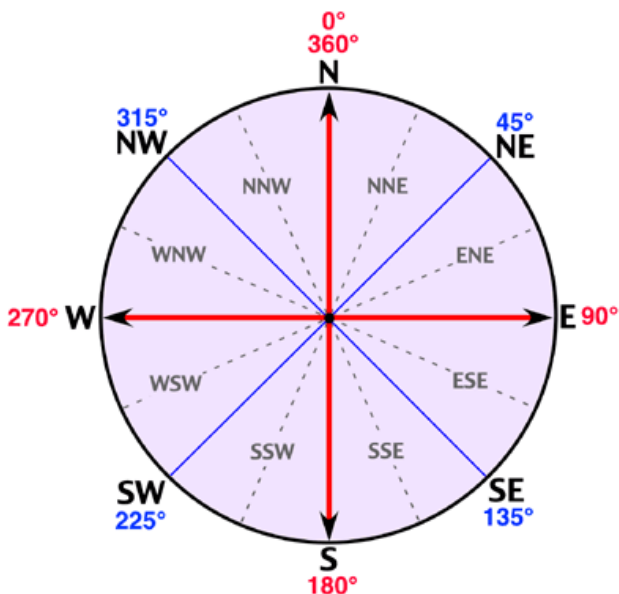
In general, try to hit with the last two thirds of the bokken’s ha.

Place a small cut (hacksaw blade is ideal) in the top of the handle of the bokken on the edge that corresponds with the “ha” side. This will ensure that only a quick glance or the brush of a fingernail is needed to determine whether the bokken is in a position where it is ready to strike.

SHORT TRAINING KATA – KEN-GI-ICHI:

Ken-Gi-Ichi is a short training kata used in aikido. Like many training kata it covers eight directions. It is relatively simple to perform with the only difficulty being to get the directions correct. This training kata should be mastered before attempting the more difficult jutsu kata – Bokken No Jutte.

Assume you are at the centre of a compass and standing in the centre facing north (ie west to your left, east to your right and south directly behind you). In the text the directions will be abbreviated to N,S,E,W etc.



STANCES FOR KATA – KEN-GI-ICHI:

Stances used in the following kata are:

- Musube Dachi – 45 degree heels together stance
- Zenkutsu Dachi – forward stance
- Neko-Ashi – cat stance

KATA – KEN-GI-ICHI:

- **1** – Stand in Musube Dachi, hands at sides. Rei. Rotate right arm and breathe out. (N)
- **2** – Place back of right hand on tsuka and draw bokken quickly while taking a short step forward on right foot. (N)
- **3** – Take longer step forward on right foot and execute overhead strike. (N)
- **4** – Pull tsuka to left side, angle blade horizontally to left and step forward with left foot and, using short yori ashi, thrust kissaki at opponent. (N)
- **5** – Turn right 180 degrees with right foot forward and execute overhead strike. (S)
- **6** – Pull tsuka to left side, angle blade horizontally to left and keeping right foot forward, use short yori ashi, and thrust kissaki at opponent. (S)
- **7** – Turn left 90 degrees with left foot forward and execute overhead strike. (E)
- **8** - Pull tsuka to right side, angle blade horizontally to right and keeping left foot forward, use short yori ashi, and thrust kissaki at opponent. (E)
- **9** – Turn right 180 degrees with right foot forward and execute overhead strike. (W)
- **10** – Pull tsuka to left side, angle blade horizontally to left and keeping right foot forward, use short yori ashi, and thrust kissaki at opponent. (W)
- **11** – Turn left 45 degrees with left foot forward and execute rapid overhead strike. (SW)

- **12** – Turn right 180 degrees with right foot forward and execute rapid overhead strike. (NE)
- **13** – Turn left 45 degrees with left foot forward and execute rapid overhead strike. (NW)
- **14** – Turn right 180 degrees with right foot forward and execute rapid overhead strike. (SE)
- **15** – Turn right 225 degrees to face starting direction (N) with both hands on tsuka and bokken parallel to ground at chest height in a circular clearing path. Finish in Hidari Neko-Ashi Dachi. (N)
- **16** – Take left hand off tsuka, step back in Migi Neko-Ashi, rotate bokken in vertical anti-clockwise circle to finish with bokken in front guard position with left hand returning to tsuka. (N)
- **17** – Perform chiburi to the right in Musube Dachi with right hand on the tsuka. (N)
- **18** – Bring bokken back to front guard position with left hand returning to tsuka. Maintain zanshin before returning bokken to side.
- **19** – Use right hand to grasp tsuka in underhand grip, invert tsuka and return bokken to left side.
- **20** – Bring right fist to settle on tsuka and rei.

TECHNIQUES TO PRACTICE AND MASTER FOR KATA – BOKKEN NO JUTTE:

- 1 – simulated saya draw from the opposite hand
- 2 – overhead (otoshi) cut
- 3 – angled side cut
- 4 – horizontal (yoko) side cut
- 5 – handle strike
- 6 – cross cut
- 7 – twisting forward thrust
- 8 – rear inverted thrust
- 9 – simulated saya return to opposite hand

STANCES FOR KATA – BOKKEN NO JUTTE:

Stances used in the following kata are:

- Heisoku Dachi – feet together stance
- Heiko Dachi – shoulder width stance
- Zenkutsu Dachi – forward stance
- Kiba Dachi – straddle or “horse” stance
- Kosa Dachi – cross-legged stance
- Tsuruashi Dachi – one-legged or “crane” stance
- Kokutsu Dachi – back stance

KAMAE FOR KATA – BOKKEN NO JUTTE:

Three basic defensive positions (kamae) appear in the following kata. These are:

- 1 – Angled Side Guard Kamae (from Zenkutsu Dachi and Tsuruashi Dachi)
- 2 – Hasso Kamae (traditional vertical overhead guarding position)
- 3 – Angled Overhead Muso Kamae (using two hands – one on handle, the other on the back of the striking edge)

PRELIMINARY KATA INFORMATION FOR BOKKEN NO JUTTE:

The bokken kata below closely follows the embussen (foot pattern) and hand movements of the Shotokan karate kata – Jutte. All stances, directions and turns are the same. Therefore a detailed knowledge of Jutte is a distinct advantage to learning this bokken kata. (An excellent resource is “25 Shotokan Kata” by S Sugiyama – ISBN 0-9669048-0-X – relevant pages 146-156)

The most distinguishing feature apart from the actual weapon itself is in the employment of the arms. Whereas in Jutte kata, both hands work independent of one another, in this kata, both hands, by virtue of operating a single weapon, must work in unison with each other.

Particular notice should be taken of the use of the elbow in bent and straight arm positions.

The kata is called “Bokken No Jutte” which means Bokken (kata) of Jutte. It takes approximately 45 seconds to complete this kata.

WEAPON KATA – BOKKEN NO JUTTE:

Preliminary Movements:

Approach embussen point with bokken held at left side with left elbow sufficiently bent so that the hand is as close as possible to the obi. The bokken should be inverted with the striking edge uppermost. The left hand is used in a loose fitting grip to hold the bokken beneath the tsuba (this position simulates the saya draw of a katana).

Stand in Heisoku Dachi. Rei.

Move right foot out to Heiko Dachi. Perform ritual breathing exercise to clear the mind. (Note: Because the left hand holds the bokken, only the right arm is used in this exercise).

- **1** – Move right foot back to Heisoku Dachi, grasp handle with right hand and perform simulated saya draw so that both arms are extended to the front with elbows locked and bokken at 90 degrees to the arms with the kissaki at eye level.
- **2** – Step left foot back to Right Zenkutsu Dachi, manoeuvre bokken clockwise in crescent movement to assume a right 45 degree inverted side guarding or defensive kamae.
- **3** – Step left foot forward at 45 degrees in Left Zenkutsu Dachi and execute a 45 degree angle cut from high right to middle left. Ensure both elbows are extended.
- **4** – Step left foot towards right foot and right foot out to right side to assume a Kiba Dachi. Rotate wrists to twist striking

edge of bokken to the right and strike horizontally with both elbows locked in extended position.

- **5** – Step left foot half way towards right foot and right foot forward into Kiba Dachi. Swing bokken overhead in clockwise arc to the right to execute a 45 degree side guard or strike.
- **6** – Raise left knee, step forward on same line to face opposite direction in Kiba Dachi. Swing bokken overhead in anti-clockwise arc to the left to execute a 45 degree side guard or strike.
- **7** – Raise right knee, step forward on same line to face opposite direction in Kiba Dachi. Swing bokken overhead in clockwise arc to the right to execute a 45 degree side guard or strike.
- **8** – Swing bokken directly back overhead so that the mune edge is in line with the centre spine, step right foot across left foot in Kosa Dachi to return back down the line.
- **9** – Step left foot back along the line (body facing same direction) to assume Kiba Dachi. Strike overhead and down with bokken so that both arms finish with elbow locked. (kissaki of bokken to be at eye level)
- **10** – Slide right foot half way to left foot and left foot out again to assume Kiba Dachi. Swing bokken from right to left to strike left to strike to the left rear with the kashira OR make horizontal slicing cut.
- **11** – Raise left knee, turn to the right going back down the line, rotate the bokken in a clockwise half circle so that the mune edge is in line with the centre spine and land in Kiba Dachi. Execute overhead strike with both arms locked in the extended arm position.
- **12** – Raise right knee, turn to the left going back down the line, rotate the bokken in an anti-clockwise half circle so that the mune edge is in line with the centre spine and land in Kiba

Dachi. Execute overhead strike with both arms locked in the extended arm position.

- **13** – Raise left knee, turn to the right going back down the line, rotate the bokken in a clockwise half circle so that the mune edge is in line with the centre spine and land in Kiba Dachi. Execute overhead strike with both arms locked in the extended arm position. Kiai!
- **14** – Move right foot half way towards left foot and straighten knees to stand in Heiko Dachi. Raise bokken to Hasso Kamae with tsuba and tsuka level with, and just in front of, left shoulder. Both elbows should be bent.
- **15** – Turn to the right, move right foot back down the line to land in Right Zenkutsu Dachi, strike from left to right and then from right to left with both strikes at 45 degrees.
- **16** – Move left foot to right foot then raise to right knee to assume Right Tsuruashi Dachi with left hip facing forward. Move bokken to a right vertical inverted side guarding kamae.
- **17** – Step left foot forward into Left Zenkutsu Dachi, strike from right to left and then from left to right with both strikes at 45 degrees.
- **18** – Move right foot to left foot then raise to left knee to assume Left Tsuruashi Dachi with right hip facing forward. Move bokken to a left vertical inverted side guarding kamae.
- **19** – Step forward on right foot into Right Zenkutsu Dachi and strike with bokken from left to right at 45 degrees.
- **20** – Turn 270 degrees anti-clockwise to the left to take up a Right Kokutsu Dachi. Raise bokken overhead in Muso Kamae with right hand on the tsuka and left hand supporting the mune at the mid-point with the bokken, angled down at 45 degrees.

- **21** – Turn hips to the right to take up a Left Kokutsu Dachi. Transfer hands, raise bokken overhead in Muso kamae with left hand on the on tsuka and right hand supporting the mune at the mid-point with the bokken, angled down at 45 degrees.
- **22** – Step left foot forward into Left Zenkutsu Dachi. Strike overhead using right hand to guide bokken along the mune until normal grip can be taken.
- **23** – Step right foot forward into Right Zenkutsu Dachi. Raise elbows, thrust kashira forward in short strike then strike down overhead so that arms are locked in the extended elbow position.
- **24** – Turn anticlockwise 180 degrees to the rear and take up a Left Zenkutsu Dachi. Raise elbows, thrust kashira forward in a short strike. Strike down overhead so that arms are locked in the extended elbow position.
- **25** – Bring both hands to the left hip with elbows bent then stepping forward or right foot slide using Yori Ashi technique to finish in a Right Zenkutsu Dachi. At the same time thrust forward the kissaki of the bokken while twisting it so that the ha faces to the left. The bokken should finish parallel to the ground at approximately chest height and in the furthest position possible which can only be achieved by straightening both elbows (the significance of the twisted position is for rib penetration).
- **26** – Bring left foot to right foot in a brief Heisoku Dachi then turn 180 degrees anti-clockwise to the left while maintaining the Heisoku Dachi. Remove left hand from the handle of the bokken and allow the mune to strike the crook of the left elbow. Lightly draw the entire length of the mune across the left elbow. Form the simulated saya opening with the left hand and simulate the sheathing of the bokken.
- **27** – Step right foot out to Heiko Dachi. Use right arm to perform clearing breathing exercise.

- **28** – Step right foot back to left foot in Heisoku Dachi. With left hand still holding the bokken in a simulated saya, move right hand to right side. Apply right fist to tsuka. Rei.

BOKKEN KUMITACHI:

The following training kumitachi can be practiced to add skill and understanding of bokken versus bokken.

In the following bokken kumitachi the additional terms are used:

- Tori – defender (you)
- Uke – attacker (opponent)
- Kote – wrist

Kumitachi - Defences Against Overhead Attack From Another Bokken – Examples Moving to the Left:

Tori uses angled deflection of bokken to the right (see defensive position in move #2 of Bokken No Jutte)...

- **1 – Kote Cut**
... step left to the side at 9.00 o'clock and use kote cut to **Uke's** front wrist.
- **2 – Carotid Kashira Attack**
... step left and forward to 11.00 o'clock and use vertical kashira strike to **Uke's** carotid artery or collar bone.
- **3 – Arm Entanglement, Dis-arm & Kashira Strike**
... step left to the side at 9.00 o'clock and use kissaki thrust to go between **Uke's** arms. Use left arm to grasp front of bokken and rotate anti-clockwise to bring kashira to face of **Uke**.

- **4 – Spinning Rib Strike**

... step left to the side at 9.00 o'clock, step right to 11.00 o'clock then turn anticlockwise into **Uke** to strike **Uke's** ribs with the kashira.

- **5 – Rushing Ha Strike**

... step left to the side at 10.00 o'clock, step right to left then forward again on left past **Uke** to strike **Uke's** ribs with the ha.

Kumitachi - Defences Against Overhead Attack From Another Bokken – Examples - Moving to the Right:

Tori uses angled deflection of bokken to the left...

- **1 – Kosa Dachi Spinning Rib Strike**

... step left foot to the right to 2.00 o'clock in Kosa Dachi then turn clockwise right to face **Uke** in Zenkutsu Dachi and execute strike to **Uke's** ribs with the ha.

- **2 – Sliding Otoshi Crown Strike**

... slide left foot to right foot at 2.00 o'clock and execute strike to rear of **Uke's** skull.

- **3 – Dropping Kissaki Throat Spear**

... drop into Migi Hiza Dachi (Right Knee Stance) at 2.00 o'clock and spear kissaki of bokken upwards at **Uke's** throat.

- **4 – Braced Kashira Face Thrust**

... step right foot to the right at 2.00 o'clock, grasp bokken at midpoint with left hand and thrust kashira into **Uke's** face.

- **5 – Spinning Carotid Kashira Thrust and Mune Strangle**

... step left foot to right at 2.00 o'clock, spin clockwise, thrust kashira into **Uke's** carotid artery. Move behind **Uke**, grasp bokken at mid point, raise over **Uke's** head and execute a standing rear strangle with the mune. (Note: Drag **Uke** backwards to prevent a shoulder throw. Also, be wary of **Uke's** bokken)

GLOSSARY OF SWORD TERMS :

Bogu – body armour worn in kendo
Bokken – wooden sword
Ha – blade of sword
Hidari – left
Hiza dachi – knee stance (all other stances listed on page 9)
Kamae (also Gamae) – posture or position
Kashira – handle end of sword
Katana – metal sword
Kendo – fighting with the shinai
Kenjutsu – fighting with the bokken
Kensei – sword saint
Kissaki – tip of sword
Kobudo – study and use of Japanese and Okinawan weapons
Kote – wrist
Kumitachi – practice with a partner (literally “swords coming together”)
Ma'ai – distance, usually between two opponents
Migi – right
Mune – back of sword
Otoshi – downward or descending
Rei – bow (otagi ni rei = bow to each other)
Saya – wooden scabbard of the katana
Shinai – sword made of split bamboo
Tori – defender
Tsuba – hand guard of sword
Tsuka – handle of sword
Uke – partner
Yoko – side
Yori-ashi – sliding the stance

“If you seek mastery of the sword,
seek first sincerity of the heart,
for the former is but a reflection of the latter.”
- Iwakura Yoshinori (Yagyu Ryu)