



# THE HISTORY OF OMEGA WEAPONS

LEARN & UNDERSTAND THE HISTOY OF THE OMEGA WEAPONS.  
BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN TO A BLACK BELT INSTRUCTOR.

## BASIC HISTORY OF OKINAWAN WEAPONS

Most of the weapons we learn in Omega are based off of Okinawan Kobudo. Kobudo is a 20th century Japanese term that can be translated as “old martial way of Okinawa” and refers to the Okinawan systems of weapon based martial arts.

One of the biggest myths in martial arts is that the Okinawan farm tools evolved into weapons after the Satsuma Samurai Clan took over what was known as the Ryukyu Kingdoms (Okinawa’s name before the official annexation into Japan in 1897) and prohibited weapons, such as swords, spears and firearms. The reality is that evidence shows that Martial artists from Okinawa studied extensively in China and most of the weapons that are seen in Okinawan Kobudo can trace their origins back to mainland Asia. What is true about that myth is that when the occupying Japanese warlords took over Okinawa they abolished the caste system and banned weapons. This left the martial artist aristocrats and lords to repurpose common everyday objects like farm tools to be approximations of the weapons they had already studied previously, and it allowed them to hide their weapons and the continuation of their art in plain sight.

## HISTORY OF THE BO

The Bo, which literally means “staff” (so saying “bo staff” is actually like saying “staff staff”), is traditionally a long wooden weapon usually made from hardwood and measuring about 1.8 meters, or Rokushaku (roku=6, shaku=unit of measurement that equals about 1 foot) but could sometimes be as long as kyushaku (9 feet). Although, the Bo can also be made of more flexible woods, bamboo, or rattan and the length can be adjusted to fit the height of the practitioner.

The earliest versions of the staff can be traced back as far back as recorded history in both the east and the west, however the exact origin is unknown. Over the centuries the use of the bo became more developed and defined, from being a simple stick, club, or branch, used to both defend against attackers and help get food, to what it is today.

When weapons were banned in Okinawa it is believed that the bo was disguised as a tenbin, a stick balanced across the shoulders used to carry buckets of food, water carried on either end. While it may be true that the Okinowans utilized the tenbin as a bo, the bo did not originate as a tenbin. Historians note that the weapons used in Okinawan martial arts are similar to those found in China, Malaysia, and Indonesia dating from before the 14th century.

## HISTORY OF THE ESKRIMA

The Eskrima Stick is usually made from rattan, hardwood, or more modern versions, even being made of fiberglass. The stick in eskrima has no exact defined length for use, although the recommended rule of thumb for the length is that they should be as long as the practitioner’s arm and around an inch in thickness.

Known by a few names, “Eskrima” is actually the term for the Filipino style of Martial Arts, not the weapon itself. Called “Kali” by the native practitioner, it is a weapons based fighting style that teaches stick, knife, sword, and spear combat. The history of the art can be traced back nearly 3000 years, so the art of eskrima was already firmly established and practiced by the peasant classes in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia by the 1500’s when Spanish explorers came to the area. The Spaniards were impressed and gave the style the names “Eskrima” from the Spanish word for “fencing” (esgrima), and “Arnis” from the word for “armor” (arnes).

It is believed that the use of the sticks made its way from the Philippines to Okinawa through trading and knowledge exchange before the former had even become a country. The Okinwans integrated it into their kobudo systems. In Japanese the sticks are called Tanbo.



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## HISTORY OF THE NUNCHAKU

The Nunchaku. The word nunchaku comes from the the Ryukyu language (original okinawan language) and means (nun=two chaku=unit of measurement). Generally the nunchaku consists of two wooden sticks bound together by a short length of either rope or chain. Each of the sticks usually measure around one shaku or one foot, though it is not uncommon for nunchaku to be up to 14 inches, and the cord or chain should be long enough that it lays across the open palm with the sticks perpendicular to the ground and hanging freely.

Although the exact history of the nunchaku is unclear it is believed the martial artist from Ryukyu (Okinawa) studied various martial arts extensively in China and brought back their knowledge to Okinawa, the nunchaku is thought to be a variation of the chinese war flail. The nunchaku is an example of Okinawan martial artists repurposing a common tool or object to be able to continue to train and protect themselves after the weapon ban. An item called a muge (okinawan horse bridle) was used both to replace and conceal the weapons they were no longer allowed to carry or use.

## HISTORY OF THE SAI

The Sai is a metal weapon that is comprised of three prongs. The straight long middle prong is called the monouchi and the two shorter curved side prongs are called the yoku. The sai's handle, called a tsuka, is usually wrapped in leather or cord. The optimal length of the sai usually depends on the length of the user's forearms but can range in lengths from 14 to almost 20 inches. The sai are traditionally used in pairs or in a set of three, one to throw and two with which to fight.

Although the sai is now considered a Japanese weapon, before they arrived in Okinawa, history shows that the sai's potential origin can be traced back to many possible sources throughout the Asian continent, including China, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. What we do know is that the sai was likely imported to Okinawa from China, as evidence shows that the Okinawan people assimilated much of the culture and arts from China. The sai is one evidence of this cultural exchange as we see the sai first being used in China and then in Okinawa as a policing weapon similar to a baton. The sai are ideal for this use because of its devastating less-than-lethal strikes, ability to trap the arms and hands to subdue someone, or for being thrown at escaping criminal's legs to tangle them up, making them easier to catch. Okinawan martial artists continued to develop the use of the sai in the various kobudo schools, preserving the art to what we see today.

## HISTORY OF THE TONFA

The Tonfa is a weapon normally made of wood, usually either red or white oak, that has a perpendicular handle that is located a little less than a third of the way down the shaft, and is usually wielded in pairs. The tonfa is usually around 15 to 20 inches in length, but can be adjusted to fit the user. As the rule of thumb, when held by the handle, the tonfa should extend about an inch past the elbow.

The origin of the tonfa is, like most martial arts weapons, heavily debated, however, the most common theories credit China, the Chinese word for tonfa meaning "crutch", which may suggest the weapon originating from a similar device. In addition to the theory that the weapons origin comes from outside Okinawa, there is the idea that the tonfa came from the handle of a millstone that would have been used by peasants in Okinawa once weapons had been banned by the Japanese government in the 14th century. The reality is that the use and practice of these weapons would have been primarily utilized by the Okinawan upper classes, who imported many martial arts from places like China. Today many law enforcement agencies around the world utilize the side-handle baton, derived from the tonfa, as the ideal non-lethal defensive weapon.

