

The system of hand-to-hand combat in the Polish Army in synthetic terms

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Abstract

The history of all wars confirms the high dependence of soldiers' effectiveness on their physical fitness and personality traits. Therefore the soldiers are trained among others in self-defence skills and hand-to-hand combat. The self-defence skills are also essential for soldiers on peacekeeping missions. The aim of this scientific essay is the most general knowledge about the hand-to-hand combat system in the Polish Army in synthetic terms, emphasizing only certain tendencies in changing external circumstances since 1918. Unfortunately, two important recommendations have been ignored. Firstly, unfight has not been implemented either in Polish Armed Forces or in CISM. Secondly, an empirically verified (and PhD) unique system of soldier education based on the complementary use of combat sports and hand-to-hand combat exercises.

Key words: samurai • self-defence • soldiers • testing fights in a vertical posture • unfight

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Hand-to-hand combat - this term refers to close-quarters combat using white weapons and the fight between two unarmed opponents using grappling and striking [48].

Self-defence – *noun* fighting techniques used for defending oneself against physical attack, especially unarmed combat techniques such as those used in many of the martial arts [49].

Technique– *noun* a way of performing an action [49].

Sambo – is a Russian martial art and combat sport. The word "SAMBO" is an acronym for **SAM**ozashchita **Bez** **Oruzhiya**, which literally translates as "self-defense without weapons". Sambo is relatively modern since its development began in the early 1920s by the **Soviet Red Army** to improve their hand-to-hand combat abilities. It was intended to be a merger of the most effective techniques of other martial arts. The pioneers of Sambo were **Viktor Spiridonov** and **Vasili Oshchepkov**. Oshchepkov died in prison as a result of the **Great Purge** after being accused of being a Japanese spy. Oshchepkov spent several years living in Japan and training in **judo** under its founder **Jigoro Kano** [50].

INTRODUCTION

The history of all wars confirms the high dependence of soldiers' effectiveness on their physical fitness [1] and personality traits [2]. These traits are partly genetically determined and are developed in the training process [3-5]. To this end, soldiers are trained in self-defence skills [6] and hand-to-hand combat [7]. It should be noted that self-defence skills are also essential for soldiers on peacekeeping missions [8]. Nowadays, modern weapons and the skills to use them play an important role [9]. However, there are situations where soldiers cannot use weapons through legal restrictions for various reasons. In such situations, they can only refer to their hand-to-hand combat skills [10]. These confrontations are significantly different from sports combat because they are not limited by any rules [11]. The range of soldiers' actions includes self-defence skills, intervention techniques and direct contact combat [12].

Ninety percent of hand-to-hand combat is based on avoiding potential threats. The remaining ten percent are physical actions involving confrontation with the attacker to overpower him [13]. Getting into a confrontation is very easy. In contrast, avoiding a fight is more difficult and requires knowledge of the potential threat situation [14]. Therefore, soldiers must know and be able to recognize threats. It should be noted that when soldiers have done everything to avoid conflict and it has proved ineffective, then they must face direct confrontation with full commitment and confidence [15]. Everyone has the right to defend themselves against physical attacks [16]. Knowledge, skill, and belief in the cause for which one is fighting give soldiers the strength and determination they need to win. Determined actions, coupled with strong characters, preceded by proper training have a high probability of success in defending against physical attack.

The aim of this scientific essay is the most general knowledge about the hand-to-hand combat system in the Polish Army in synthetic terms, emphasizing only certain tendencies in changing external circumstances since 1918.

The method used was desk research [17]. Official and authorized source materials in the form of articles, books, orders and interviews were analysed. The text does not specify the dignity of the Polish Army officers responsible for the development of Polish military close combat due to sensitive data.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND SOME TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

From wrestling to krav maga and sambo

The first form of combat widely used in direct contact in the Polish Army was wrestling [18]. Already in the Middle Ages, it played a dominant role in hand-to-hand combat. In those days, heavy-armed knights appeared on the battlefields, along with new combat gear. Therefore, it was necessary to modify the existing combat techniques. Stronger wrestlers, who were able to knock a heavily-armed opponent off balance and knock him down, had a better chance of winning. Such a knight lying on the ground, became defenceless due to the weight of his armor, even against a poorly armed squire. The above problems resulted in the creation of two specialties: choppers - excellent fencers; and constrictors - hand-to-hand combat specialists. In the Middle Ages, wrestling was one of the seven main knightly arts, preparing knights for battle [19].

However, there is no doubt that in the later period, martial arts from the Far East had the greatest influence on the development of self-defence in the Polish army [20]. The main role here was played by ju-jitsu [21] and judo [22]. Polish soldiers had the opportunity to encounter ju-jitsu in the Russian-Japanese War and in the partitioned armies. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the first known and trained method of self-defence in Poland. It was mainly used to train the army and the police.

Between 1918 and 1939, the Polish Army used ju-jitsu to teach hand-to-hand combat by combining it with boxing, fencing, wrestling, bayonet fighting, stick fighting, and army shovel fighting. The post-war times saw a period of increased popularity of combat sports in both civilian and military circles. Judo came to the fore, and its techniques began to appear in military manuals. In 1983, a uniform self-defence curriculum based on Jigoro Kano's method [23] was adopted in the Polish Army and gradually expanded to include effective karate [24, 25] and kickboxing techniques. In the 1990s, targeted units of the Polish Army began to use Brazilian jiu-jitsu, krav maga (also mixed martial arts), and sambo (wrestling invariably symbolizes the ancient traditions of hand-to-hand combat [26]). This was the result of the need to adapt the Polish Army to modern threats. Internal combat systems had such special and landing craft units as: Grupa Reagowania

Operacyjno-Manewrowego (GROM), 1 Pułk Specjalny Komandosów, 6 Brygada Desantowa Szturmowa, 25 Brygada Kawalerii Powietrznej, and 62 Kompania Specjalna.

In relation to “operation other than war”

Missions in Iraq and Afghanistan have indicated new directions in the training and preparation of the Polish military for operations abroad. Accordingly, a group of Polish Army officers, in consultation with Richard Douieb of the International Krav Maga Institute [27], developed the first scope of a combat system called “Close contact combat for soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces.” The full scope of this combat system was finalized by a group of Polish Army officers with lecturers from the Poznan University of Physical Education [28]. It was published as the “Methodological Manual for the Close Contact Combat Program for Soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland” [29]. This manual contains three scopes and the legal basis for the use of force, safety rules, first aid, and organizational and methodological guidelines. Some of the issues and program content were taken from the world programs of intervention techniques of the police, prison service and other self-defence systems of the uniformed services. It was noted that the above-mentioned system is effective in training soldiers if three conditions are met:

1. soldiers must be characterized by a willingness to master combat techniques and an adequate level of general physical fitness and specialized equipment;
2. instructors must be characterized by a high level of knowledge and practical skills, combined with teaching qualifications and qualifications in self-defence and close combat;
3. the duration of training should ensure mastery of the taught elements to a degree that guarantees their effectiveness.

In the new combat system, it is impossible to ignore elements related to the military tactics of the subunit and the type of tasks it performs. Therefore, hand-to-hand combat classes are conducted with all equipment and armament. Training is based on real threat situations and tactical solutions. Thus, the basics of historical samurai training tactics are revisited. Both the ancient warrior of the Far East and the modern soldier first use

the firearms, white weapons or other pieces of equipment in his possession. Only in the event of loss of weapons or the inability to use them (if only for legal reasons) are direct confrontation skills used. This is why modern soldiers have so much in common with ancient warriors of the Far East, having regard to training, equipment and, most importantly, the adaptation of combat techniques to the prevailing threats on the battlefield.

In the 21st century, soldiers of the Polish Army face constant danger and accompanying combat when performing tasks at home and abroad. Therefore, they must, in training, have the ability to think quickly and accurately, to anticipate danger and to concentrate all resources during a physical clash, just as the samurai once did [30]. Therefore, the basis of effective self-defence is mental and physical readiness to face a variety of challenges. Another important thing similar to samurai ethics during the training of elite force soldiers is self-discipline. Soldiers must control their reflexes and emotions [31]. They must know how to fight while poised. The codes of martial arts in the ethics of the soldier’s profession are emphasized here. In addition, in combat, soldiers of the Polish Army have at their disposal a similarly large arsenal of weapons, heavy armor and protective gear as the historical samurai. Helmets, bulletproof vests or ballistic protectors do not differ, in their weight and discomfort in wearing them, from the armour of Far Eastern warriors. The variety of personal weapons used on the modern battlefield, similar to that of the samurai, represents a wide range of armaments used. In those Far Eastern warriors, katanas, daggers, spears, and bows were used. Modern soldiers of the Polish Army, on the other hand, have a wide range of long and short weapons, as well as grenade-type means of combat. Soldiers, like samurai, have to intervene and defend themselves in this heavy and uncomfortable equipment using acquired hand-to-hand combat skills.

Contemporary military operations

Contemporary military operations, stabilization missions, and peace-enforcing operations prove that soldiers also perform security and law-enforcement tasks that are similar to those of the police. Such examples include, for example, dealing with demonstrating people and civilians who disrupt the established legal order, situations posing a threat to escorted persons and property, or appropriate treatment of non-conflicted persons,

detainees and captives. In addition to the ability to use tools of combat, soldiers must use their own bodies and minds to resolve extreme situations [32, 33]. It means using hand-to-hand combat skills with knowledge of intervention techniques, including the use of direct coercive measures. Taking actions such as the use of weapons, is subject to certain legal conditions. The necessity to act is always enforced by aggression [34] of people posing a threat to the lives of soldiers, the health of those placed under their protection, or a threat to the property entrusted to them. Legal protection of the attacked soldiers from lawlessness is always necessary defence. This is why the role of the instructor in close combat training is so important [35] to be able to continuously improve the level of training [36].

Missed opportunities

Unfortunately, two important recommendations have been ignored. Firstly, *unfight* [37, 38] has not been implemented either in Polish Armed Forces or in CISM [39, 40]. Secondly, an empirically verified (and PhD) unique system of soldier education based on the complementary use of combat sports and hand-to-hand combat exercises [41]. Moreover, the secondary verification of the effectiveness of this system was made by Andrzej Tomczak in an experiment which was the empirical basis of his doctorate [42]. Military cadets from the Chodała experimental group dominated the third task “survival multi-discipline

events” as a multidimensional psychomotor test competence in the field of survival (“testing fights in a vertical posture – TFVP” [42-44]). There is also unique experimental evidence of the effectiveness of long-term training based on combat sports and self-defence exercises regarding motor safety in relation to: collision with a hard surface [45], with a wall [46], avoiding a collision with a moving object [47].

CONCLUSIONS

Soldiers professionally prepared to carry out military tasks should have knowledge and skills in many areas of defence education, just like historical samurai. This means proficiency in the use of technical means of conducting military operations, knowledge of the principles of tactical operations, effective firefighting with their personal weapons, the ability to survive in conditions of isolation, as well as the ability to use their musculoskeletal apparatus, weapons and elements of equipment, within their physical, motor and mental capabilities, during a direct clash with the enemy. Noteworthy is the fact that the choice of techniques used by soldiers is influenced by the distance separating them from the enemy. First of all, soldiers use weapons. Whenever the use of weapons is impossible, soldiers use unarmed combat techniques to create conditions for the use of weapons.

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