

# THE MARTIALIST ISSUE 09 & 10 CONTENT

## Remembering Bruce Tegner

By Tony Manifold

If I asked you to name a man who was one of the first to teach Asian Martial arts to westerners, who took the mysticism out of the martial arts and condensed several into his own practical self-defense system, disposing of the “chaff” of traditional Asian arts, who would you name? You might say, “That’s easy – Bruce Lee.” Well, you would be wrong, at least in this case.

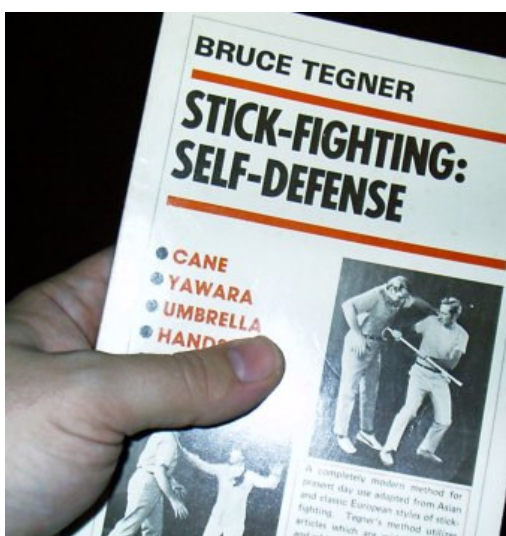


Photo by Phil Elmore

Lee is often credited with making martial arts effective again, but years before he liberated the West from Classical Karate another man had blazed that trail. Almost 20 years before anyone had ever heard of Bruce Lee, Bruce Tegner took the mystery out of Asian martial arts and made them accessible to the average westerner. He was a prolific writer whose breadth of knowledge was staggering. He was also a pioneer in the field of practical self-defense.

According to the brief biographies written in his books, Bruce Tegner was “born into the martial arts” in October of 1929. He first studied Judo under his

parents and later under legends like Kuwushima. By 1949 he was the California State Judo Champion. Along the way he also studied other martial arts, such as Karate and Aikido as well as several weapon arts. He taught actors such as Rick Nelson and James Coburn and choreographed movie fight scenes. He even taught various units in the armed forces.

Unfortunately, Bruce Tegner has been all but forgotten. His numerous books can only be found in secondhand bookshops and very few people can name the art he founded: Jukado. This is even more tragic because Bruce Tegner’s self-defense methods are some of the best. They’re simple, efficient, and effective.

One of Tegner’s main contributions to self-defense was that he dispelled a lot of the myths about the martial arts and brought realism to the fore again. One of these myths was the myth of the “Black Belt as a superman.” In his book, *Bruce Tegner’s Complete Book of Self-Defense*, he wrote, “Contrary to popular belief, the first black belts were not deadly killers; they were skilled sportsman.” He was, of course, referring to Jigoro Kano implementing the use of colored belts for Judo, which is primarily a sport and a means of physical education. He continued: “The myth of the black belt has spread widely and many people are convinced that the wearer of a black belt has super-human powers, that only a black belt qualifies a teacher of self defense...” and so on through a long list of erroneous information about belt ranking.

Tegner also dispelled the myth that only athletes should practice the martial arts.

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In fact, he challenged the widely held (at the time) fact that martial arts required athleticism. Who, he asked, is more vulnerable to assault – a little old lady or a strong young athlete? As a result, his self-defense method relied very little on strength and athleticism.

Tegner also loved to keep things simple. Rather than offer a unique answer for every attack, he taught a few simple moves that the defender could adapt to many different situations. Bob Rosenbaum, one of Bruce Tegner's Jukado black belts, explains, "[He told us] there are no pat answers... [and that] the most important weapon we have is the mind."

Tegner was also one of the first to teach *principles* that could be *adapted*, rather than teaching static rules. Bob Rosenbaum cites an example one of Tegner's theories. "Go to the immediate danger. [When attacked with a] standing rear naked choke, don't first try to strike the attacker. First try to control and negate the choke by grabbing the arm and pulling it in and down, giving yourself time to counter the choke. Only then do you counter-strike your attacker."

As is common for groundbreakers, Tegner's more traditional counterparts badmouthed him. They complained that he was too commercial, yet Rosenbaum maintains the atmosphere in Tegner's school was that of a family or home. Rosenbaum even describes Tegner as a "father figure." I don't think you can ask for much more than that in a teacher.

Tegner was blasted for teaching celebrities such as James Coburn and

Rick Nelson. When Tegner presented Nelson with a black belt, the fallout was staggering. Rosenbaum thinks Nelson and Tegner were unfairly criticized. "Bruce had all his test requirements down in writing," Bob remembers. "Ricky Nelson was given no special treatment on his testing, [and he] took two private lessons per week after the school closed for the night... Rick would not make the world forget Mike Stone or Chuck Norris, but [he] was a good black belt for that era."

All in all, Bruce Tegner was a driving force in the martial arts in the 50s and 60s. Unfortunately he is rarely remembered. When he is remembered, he is often derided for being too simplistic or as "good for beginners but very basic." Those were his greatest strengths, however.

Tegner knew that the people who needed his help were beginners. He knew that simple, effective techniques that could be adapted easily for a multitude of scenarios are what work. He also knew that self-defense and the martial arts should be available to everyone. The result was dozens of books that gave many people their first look at the martial arts.

Bruce Tegner was a pioneer. He was a trailblazer and a person who really deserves a hell of a lot more respect than he gets. He led the way for innovators like Bruce Lee and Ed Parker. He introduced many people to various systems of martial arts and his self-defense system is just as relevant today as it was back then.

Mainly, though Bruce Tegner deserves to be *remembered*. ♠