

# Chris Denwood Seminar Report: Utilising the Forearms in Combat

By Jonathan Roll

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It's that time of year again when the days are getting longer; the sun begins to shine brighter and the 'promise' of summer draws ever closer. Ideally, we should all be outside enjoying the weather whilst it lasts but instead, on a sunny Saturday morning in Cumbria, I find myself donning my dogi once more and heading down to a local Church Hall in Egremont for an eagerly awaited seminar on the use and application of the forearms in karate.



Why? Well it's simple really. This day marks the first E.S.K.K seminar of 2008 and I wouldn't miss it for the world! When practicing martial arts or any hobby for that matter, there's always a risk of becoming too overwhelmed by the amount of information you'd like to take in. For me, the advantage of seminars is that they give you a chance to examine concepts that you may either have never considered before or been far too busy with other aspects to examine in any depth. It was with this in mind that I entered the dojo on Saturday April 19th, ready for whatever useful lessons were in store for me.

This is not the first seminar taught by Chris Denwood that I've attended and I'll tell you now - it certainly isn't going to be the last! The structure followed much the same pattern as those in previous seminars and this suited me just fine. Chris has a very analytical approach to karate and this is demonstrated throughout the logical way to which he always structures and manages his subject matter - in this case, the use of the forearms in combat. Regular readers of Combat magazine may recognise this topic from a recently published article written by Chris entitled "A poor craftsman will always blames his tools". It was because of the large number of requests (and no doubt my constant nagging) that Chris decided to teach a seminar in order to supplement this particular piece.



We began the day by examining the strengths and weaknesses associated with the forearm to better understand this most versatile tool, before looking at how we can condition the limb in preparation for its use in combat. Chris spent some time discussing the concept of 'overload' and how the human body can improve over time in response to applying a positive and progressive stimulus of physical stress.

The series of ballistic and frictional conditioning drills we practiced encompassed all parts of the forearm and gave all attendees a method of gradually training the arms so as not to incur injury. This section also included the use of some traditional equipment; bamboo bundles and an ingenious two-man drill that reproduces some of the conditioning methods of the Okinawan 'tan' (like a stone barbell) with just a simple brush shank and your partner providing the necessary resistance. It was with great surprise that lunch was announced after this (we'd managed a full 2 hours already just on conditioning?). Time does indeed fly when you're having fun!



After lunch, the afternoon was split into two sections and looked at exploiting the strengths and weaknesses of the forearm. The first half of the session covered numerous practical applications from the traditional kata including strikes, bars, chokes, joint attacks etc. The key to all these movements was the need to stay adaptable and this was emphasised by Chris repeatedly. The spirit of karate is such that if one technique doesn't work you should simply blend into the next one - several good examples of this followed. It was amazing to see that despite the fact the techniques shown were changing all the time, the concepts behind them all remained the same and furthermore, Chris still remarkably managed to apply the forearm throughout!



The second half of the afternoon was spent looking at the weaknesses associated with the forearm and how this area could be exploited to give you an advantage in a confrontation. There was definitely a vast range provided here as the applications shown varied in both swiftness and severity, from simple restraints to others that were far more 'serious'. It was a real an eye opener to see how the same 'easy to grasp' concepts could be applied and adapted in so many ways.

This is Chris' typical way of teaching – he always starts off with a simple movement or concept and progresses this further in stages. He always says it's like building a fine house – get the foundations right initially and then great structures can easily be placed on top! Again it was slightly shocking when Chris announced that time was up and we had to bow out. Before we did though, he answered a few interesting questions and quickly gave a demonstration of some tactile drills (kakie) that unfortunately, we didn't have time to cover during the seminar. However, even this brief two minute explanation opened a whole series of new doors for me. I suspect I'm not the only one hoping for future seminar to cover these in more depth!



The pace at which the concepts and techniques were covered throughout the day was perfect. Chris' approach was such that everyone managed to get something positive from the seminar regardless of technical ability and without 'swamping' anyone with too much information at once. For me, the day was fantastic and if you ever get the chance to attend one of Chris' seminars in the future then I couldn't recommend it more! As the various karate ka from clubs all around Cumbria bowed out and left the dojo, it was pleasing to hear how much everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day. However, what really made me smile were the last minute discussions around those principles we'd just covered, because for those people and myself, the seed had well and truly been sown for a completely new chapter of knowledge - may there be many more to come!

