

Is The Garrotte a Legitimate Self-Defense Tool?

Some people have a heavy opinion on this issue. They have opinions as to the legitimacy of the garrotte as a tool of self-preservation. Others have strong opinions as to the definition of "garrotte."

[I'm not going to debate the spelling, I'm using Col. Rex Applegate's spelling of the word and whenever you see me use something different, it's a typo.]

Some people say, "Well, the garrotte is a..." and then they define it to the exclusion of anything else. The simple fact of the matter is, a "Garrotte" was an execution device that was utilized in Spain up until the mid-1970s. A few other countries used it now and again. And there were many different types of garrottes used as execution devices.

When someone says, "The garrotte is only a killing weapon..." Technically, they are correct, but they are not usually speaking of the execution device that was once used for Capital Punishment, therefore, they are incorrect in reality.

The number one deciding factor is intent. How you use it. You can use some "garrottes" as a Flexible Weapon with no intent whatsoever to kill.

The garrotte had a couple of different forms. One had a metallic collar that was placed around your neck and the collar had a threaded hole that a bolt was inserted through. On the other end of the bolt was a large "T" handle for the executioner. The condemned was seated in a chair, the collar placed over a wooden post and the head of the prisoner, then, the executioner began to tighten the contraption until your neck was crushed or your vertebrae were dislocated, broken or crushed.

Later versions had a blade that ran through the bolt for what was thought to be a "mercy killing." The blade was slipped between the vertebrae, severing the spinal cord.

In a pinch, the improvised garrotte could be a seat, wooden post, strong cord and a metal bar. The noose being affixed around the post and neck of the condemned, the bar could be inserted and the cord twisted until death occurred. Much like using a tourniquet and stick.

These are "garrottes." The important thing to remember is, if someone says, "No, that's not a garrotte, this is a garrotte..." And they are speaking in absolutes or anything other than an execution device, they're incorrect. More on that later.

Other "Garrottes"

So, if we exclude the execution devices, what is left? If we do exclude the execution devices, any flexible or semi-flexible weapon that cuts the air off by compressing and/or crushing the trachea, severs (up to and including complete decapitation) the trachea and other vital structures (carotid arteries, jugular veins, vagus nerve, etc.) or breaks the neck, we have a list of items that have been used as a "garrotte."

One Point of View: The Debate

I was once involved in a debate with a person who insisted that a "True Garrotte" would be a "cutter." Meaning, a piano wire or guitar string garrotte. The wire being so fine that it would cut into the structures rather than compress/crush them.

If we trace the lineage of these hand held devices back to the origin of the word, as I did above, we see the "Original Garrotte" did nothing of the sort. The "Original" killed by compression and/or crushing and sometimes neck fracture.

Yet, I consider the "cutters" a form of garrotte because there is modern history to back that up. However, the "cutter" type of garrotte is not a "true" garrotte. It's just another type of garrotte.

The "Cutter"

Back before delicatessens had slicer machines, the cheese was usually cut by a wire. Yes, a "*Cheese Cutter*" was basically a wire with two handles. As far as I can tell, this is where the "Modern Cutter Garrotte" came from. The source is Melton's "Clandestine Warfare."

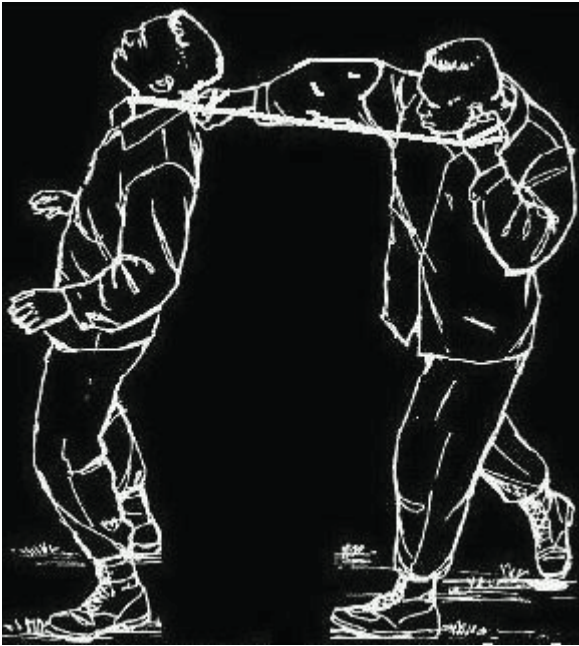
The British SOE and American OSS used these devices, to what degree I do not know. Some wire garrottes with machined and knurled brass handles (for enhanced grip) were manufactured and issued. They are in the OSS Weapons Catalog, as well as other references...

Gigli bone saws were also used as "Survival Saws" as well as "Cutter" Garrottes during World War Two.

The "Crusher"

"The Garrotte. Thugs in India have long been known for their method of strangling, called garrotting. It can be executed with a rope, strong cord or a piece of twisted cloth about three feet long with a noose in one end. This is a garrotte. Properly applied, it produces a deadly, silent strangle.

Slip the noose over the forefinger of the right hand so that the loop lies down across the palm toward the little finger. Close the right hand and pick up the free end of the cord with the left hand, so that the thumb and fingers are on the inner side of the cord and the end is even with the little finger. Approach the victim from the rear and, opening the right hand, throw the loop over his head with the left. Use the left hand to draw the noose through the right hand until it is nearly taut about the neck. Then close the right hand about the noose at the back of the victim's neck and twist as you would in applying a tourniquet. With your hand against the back of his neck and your right arm stiff, the victim is held at arm's length and is unable to free himself from the strangling cord or to reach his attacker. A hard pull to the rear at this point will make the victim fall backward and cause his chin to fold down over the cord, thus adding his own body weight to the pressure of the strangle." ~Col. Rex Applegate, Kill or Get Killed



In the illustration above you can see the finishing position of what Applegate describes. The right hand is **INSIDE** the loop, when the loop is pulled tight around the neck and your hand, a fist is made with the open hand then the fist is cranked counterclockwise. Much like a stick in a tourniquet. The palm is open and oriented **UP**, then closed into a fist and oriented **DOWN**.

What Colonel Applegate was describing was the method and weapon of the ancient Thuggee Cult of India. This is where we get our slang word of "thug." The word "Thug" comes from the Hindi verb, "*thaglana*," which means, "to deceive."

I do not know if the garrotte described above contained a rupee or not. There is another line of thought that there was more than one way to strangle with a scarf [rumal]. And that was, a rupee or rupees [coins] were tied into the end of the scarf to give it weight so it could be thrown around the neck and then the strangle was initiated. In fact, more than a line of thought, there is proof of this from the period of British Occupation of India when the British suppressed the Thuggee Cult and executed and imprisoned thousands of Thugs.

Throwing the Japanese Fighting Chain, which is weighted, in such a way that the chain is propelled around the neck is also throughout Japanese Martial Arts that focus on the Manrikigusari/Kusarifundo.

In "Kill or Get Killed," Applegate then mentions the "Stick Strangle." This is a triangular method where the stick is held in reverse grip and inserted under the chin from behind (or from the front)...John Steyers covered this Stick Strangle in his book, "Cold Steel."

Then, he addresses other methods of strangulation:

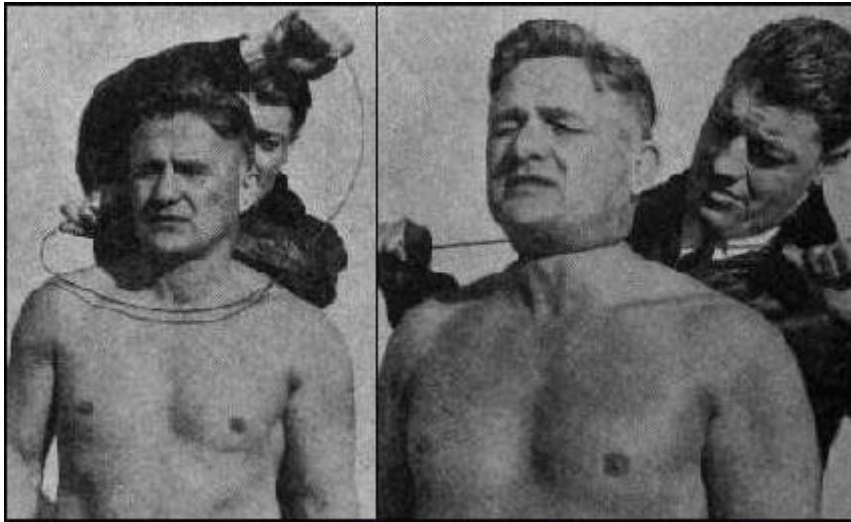
"The Cord Strangle. Another type of strangulation, as old as history in the Far East, is accomplished with any light cord or wire of good tensile strength, about 18 inches long. The thinner the cord or wire, the quicker will be the effectiveness. Tie a loop at each end of the cord, or tie small wooden blocks on the ends, so that a secure grip can be taken. Approaching the man from the rear, throw him off balance, as with the stick [strangle], with your right foot against the inside of his right knee. With a hand on each end of the cord (the cord held taut), bring the cord over the victim's head and back against the throat. Cross the hands at the rear of the neck and apply pressure both ways. Strangulation is quick and silent..." ~Applegate

You will notice that Col. Applegate describes the cord/wire as being taut when going over the head. During the approach, the arms would not be crossed. After the garrotte is thrown over the head, the arms would then cross at the wrists/forearms. Imagine holding your hands out in front of you as if you are preparing to clap your hands together. Then, with your right palm, touch your left elbow and simultaneously, with the left palm, touch your right elbow. The forearms are parallel to one another. That is the motion you make. This also takes a shorter cord/wire to use effectively. The wrists/forearms are crossed after the loop has been thrown over the head, not before.

This is actually a weaker garrotting method than having the arms crossed on the approach as is currently taught in the U.S. Army's Combatives Manual, 21-150 where the arms are crossed at the wrists/forearms on the approach. Then when the

loop is thrown over the head of the enemy, the arms are jerked apart. This is much stronger.

There is another, older way of achieving the same position without approaching with the arms already crossed. It was depicted in the U.S. Navy's World War Two Hand to Hand Combat Manual for Naval Aviators, the famous "V-5" manual. This is shown below.



Notice that as the years passed, not much changed. This is the U.S. Army's Field Manual 21-150 marked December 1971. Showing the same, basic method.



In this method, your left hand makes a cross-body movement and is positioned at the back of the enemy's right shoulder. The right hand holding the other end of the garrote is then looped over the head of the enemy in a semi-circular, counterclockwise motion and then the arms are pulled apart.

Takedowns, Using the Enemy's Weight

There are four basic ways to take someone to the ground immediately following any of these maneuvers.

#1 Pulling straight downward and back.

#2 Kicking the back of the knee and pulling back and down.

#3 Knee strike to the lower back and a pull backwards and down.

#4 A quick turn of the body where you are back to back with the enemy and the enemy is hoisted off of his feet to complete the crush. This is the movement that can possibly result in decapitation if a "cutter" garrotte is used.

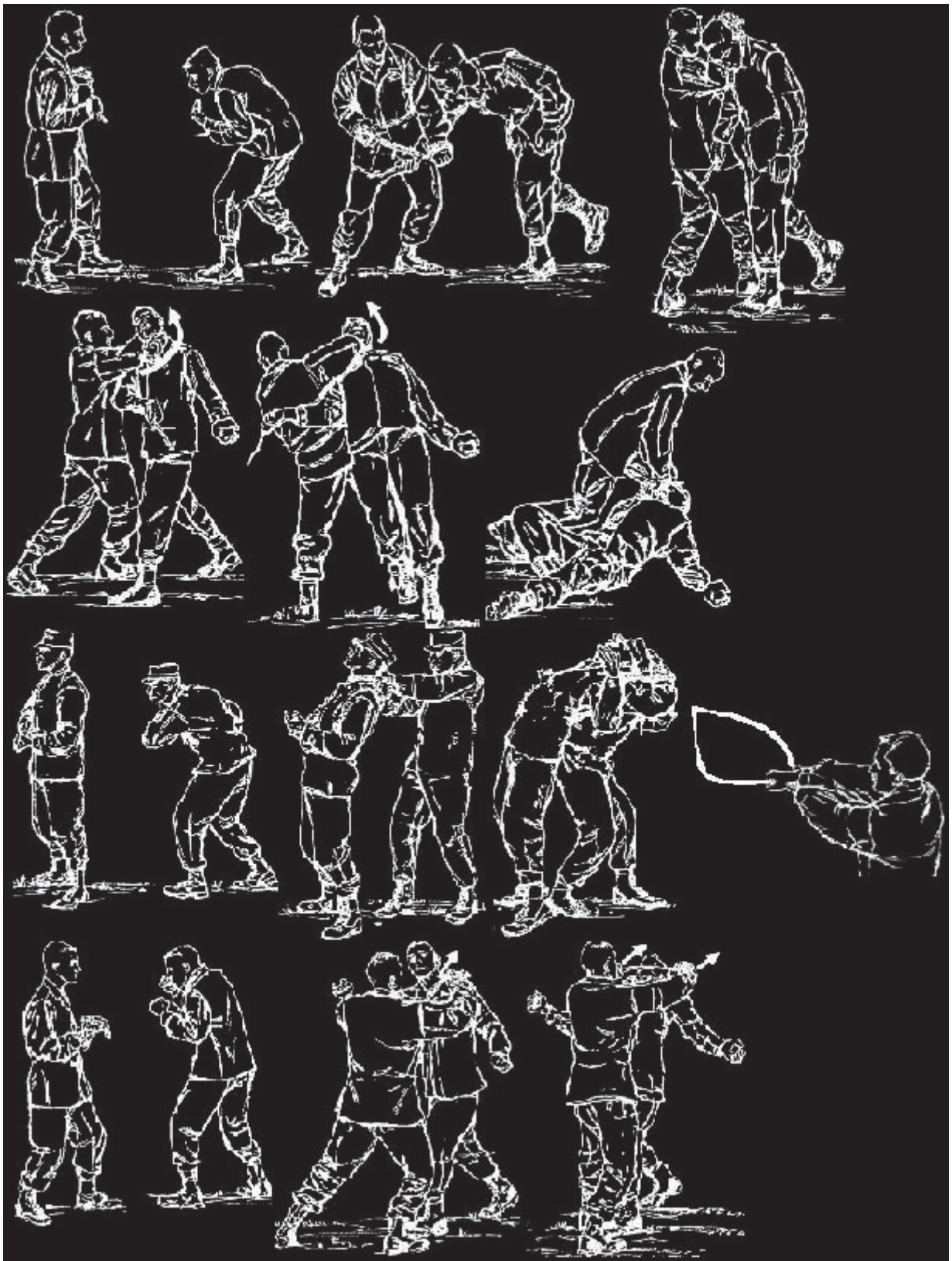
So, is the garrotte a legitimate tool of Self-defense? That was the original question. The answer to the question is, it all depends on what type of garrotte you are going to use really.

I cannot imagine going through the trouble of carrying something with such a single purpose as a "cutting" garrotte. That is a specific type of weapon and the only outcome from the proper use of one is death of the opponent, and that is going to be carried out from behind almost exclusively, as in Sentry Removal.

Any belt, length of rope, cord, a telephone cord, whatever is at hand, can be a garrotte. You can carry a very strong bandana or scarf with that being carried with the intent to be used as a flexible weapon. A jacket or light coat can be used as a garrotte, like the belt, it is a common, every day item. The every day items that are all around us points to flexible weapons being really viable and valuable Self-defense tools.

Anything other than a "cutting" garrotte can be used with lethal or non-lethal intent. So, if you make an improvised garrotte from 550 ParaCord, what you do with it will be the deciding factor.

Now, we can break this down and go to Part Two, "The Flexible Weapon." Before we do, here is a series of pictures showing just a few methods. Some are not "Classical Garrotte" Techniques. They are still very important. It also shows what can be done totally unrelated to a rear attack, or, a response if the enemy turned to face you. What if someone were trying to Garrotte you from behind? This shows you how the weapon might be used against you if you thwarted the rear attack and you turned to face the attacker.





Rope cannot be banned, and criminals can always find weapons anyway, but could you defend yourself against these methods? That is the question...

In that last series of illustrations, you can substitute a jacket or a belt and you can still see the viability of the techniques. You do not have to tote around a "Garrotte," and always remember, the criminals don't have to either.