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FIGHTERS

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MORE DEADLY THAN THE MALE
Marguerite Hilliard and Geraldine Leggett
NINJA — Stephen Hayes

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL
of the Martial Arts
KARATE IN THE '70s



Story and pictures
by Peter Lewis

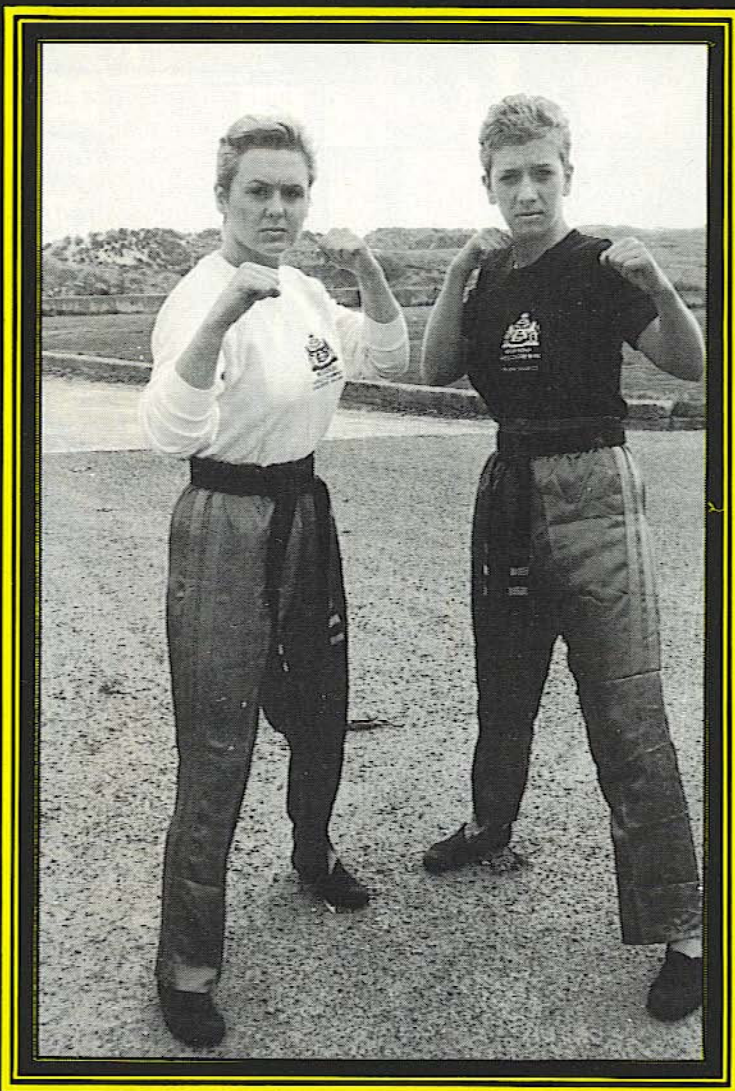
More DEADLY *than the male*

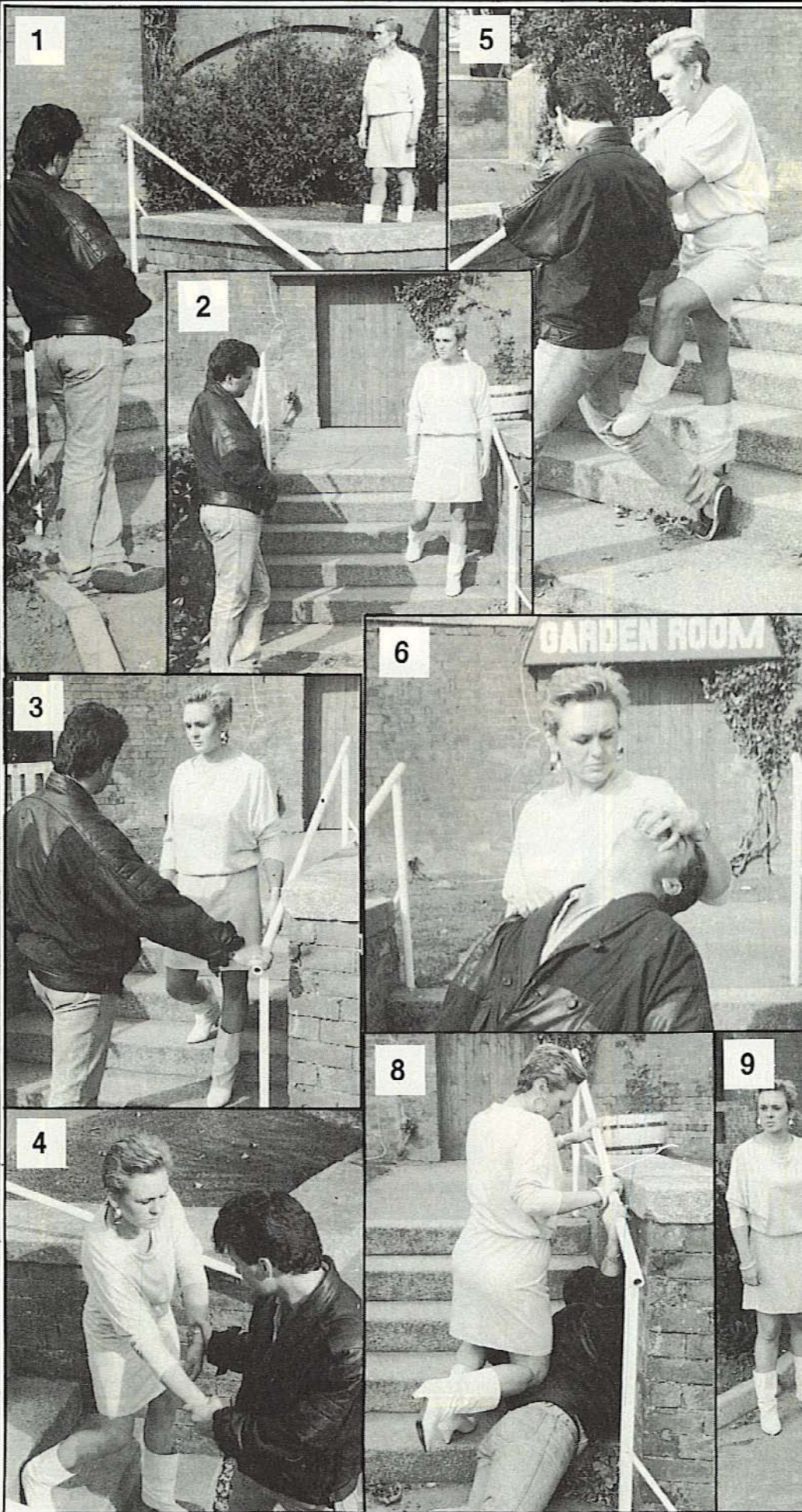
'Fighters' talks with Mugendo's dynamic double act:
Marguerite Hilliard and Geraldine Leggett

IT HAS TAKEN a little over six years for the martial art of Mugendo to reach fruition. In that time there have been stumbling blocks and in-house technique revisions for the art to become of age, so to speak. Mugendo's then unique blend of Eastern kicking methods, combined with the time-tested pro boxing hand movements, gave to the martial arts world a kind of 'East meets West' martial system which was forever changing and re-adapting to meet the needs of the 20th century.

Mugendo came at a time when martial arts sporting activity began to peak and public audiences were becoming very interested in the new sport of full and semi contact karate. So it was not unforeseen that Mugendo should follow its basic tenet of being the 'Unlimited Way', and train its adepts towards tournament fighting in the ring. New areas of training principle were tried and tested, changing and adapting to suit the needs of its new breed of young kickboxers. A series of early failures was soon met by a steady stream of successes as the Mugendo fighters began to make their mark on the kickboxing world.

Growing numbers of members on a worldwide scale led to the establishing of an international fighters rating system, whereby the kick-





1. Girl walking alone notices (2) a shady character on the steps. He steps out (3) to block her path, grabbing her (4) with both hands by the wrists. The girl turns aside (5) and kicks her attacker behind the knee joint. As he falls backwards (6) the girl rakes his face with her fingernails (see close up view — 7). As the attacker falls to the floor, the girl strikes with a knee attack to the kidneys. (8) Not waiting to view her handiwork, the girl makes good her escape (9).

boxers of the system could climb the heights to success and be judged at world level within the system, by their peers.

European titles were followed by world titles, and its champions were kept constantly aware that their positions were being vied for by a steady stream of hungry and eager young hopefuls.

Because of kickboxing's popularity throughout the world of martial arts, it would seem only natural that the next step in the state of the art was for the female element to flex their muscles and stand up to be counted. At the time, their sisters and counterparts in karate were forbidden to take part in active tournament fighting and reduced to displaying their talents with kata at major competitions.

With the advent of kickboxing, ladies saw their opportunity to also make their mark, and soon female fighters, especially in the United States, began to make a name for themselves on the circuits. Europe quickly followed suit and pretty soon virtually every major martial arts organisation had a very active and thriving ladies section.

Over in Dublin at George Canning's then academy of martial arts, two young female hopefuls were being groomed to become world class fighters. Their names were Marguerite Hilliard and Geraldine Leggett.

Geraldine Leggett is 22 years old and came to Mugendo from an early background of Wado-ryu. She has been training in martial arts for nearly eight years and is at present the Mugendo ladies world kickboxing champion in the 58 kilo class.

Marguerite Hilliard is 24 years old and has been training for a little more than six years. Currently she is the Mugendo ladies world kickboxing champion in the 56 kilo class.

Both are now senior teacher/instructors at George Canning's Kickboxing University in Dublin.

In this short interview, both girls reflected back on their past, into such areas as what motivated them in the first place, and their dedication to the art in general.

Geraldine Leggett... All that I remember of my very first fight is that I won; I just got up there and knew I had to win. Technique wise it was a long way from what I know now; it was totally different, a lot of the stuff we used was perhaps not too far removed from the traditional aspects of martial arts. But that was early days, the switch was only coming in very slowly. Technically speaking, I had many bad habits that had to be either corrected or eradicated. For instance, when I kicked, my knee would go one way and my backside would go the other. Yet at the time I thought I was good. Also, my punching ability was nothing like it should have been. I used to think that all you fought with was kicks, but in kickboxing, traditional karate techniques just don't work. The transition I made when I switched from traditional to kickboxing could perhaps be best summed up by the fact that when I was training in traditional (and bear in mind I had been in lots of competitions) I did not own one trophy. Since taking up kickboxing with Professor Canning, I now have 25 trophies, and a world championship under my belt. Proof of the pudding, don't you think?"

"Since that first kickboxing fight, my technique and ring expertise have been groomed tremendously. Methods in our style are constantly changing, to keep up with modern ideas and new coaching methods. All the time, we are learning something new, hand positioning is continuously being re-adapted, so too are the kicking techniques. The knowledge is being developed and assessed all the time. We learn a new method or technique, and then take it away to play with for a time, to try it out. Faults are ironed out and its adaptability to my own particular mode of fighting is tested. This is by means of sparring with the men at the club.

When it suits me, or when I have made certain aspects of the technique work for me, I go back to professor Canning and he teaches me something different. This continuous cycle of new and advanced methods of fighting gives me the facility of using from it, whatever suits best. Many people tend to

think that when you are shown a brilliant technique, all you need do is go away and learn it, practise with it until you become perfect. This is not so; for a technique to be any good to the individual who is using it, most important is that they understand it. They must recognise its areas of feasibility in a fight situation and also its failures. Then, and only then, can they grasp the full and real reason behind that particular technique. The people who can do this are the ones, who know how to examine underneath the surface; they are the ones with the makings of a champion."

Marguerite Hilliard... "Unlike many women in the martial arts, I joined solely for the purpose of keeping fit, not for self defence. Coming from a family of six brothers, I thought I was fairly handy anyway. But later on I tried self defence and enjoyed it, I found it a challenge.

Pretty soon I was training alongside the men in Mugendo techniques. I remember my first proper fight was with a kung fu lady in what could be loosely termed a semi-contact event. Up there in the ring I thought I had equipped myself very well but she got the decision. This made me even more determined, and I went back into training with a different feeling of determination. At a later re-match, the fight didn't get past the first round and I had my first taste of victory. The ease with which I took that girl out completely converted me to the mugendo kickboxing system.

"I feel that women in the martial arts are now making great strides on the fighting tournament scene. In the past we were always relegated to demonstrating kata, but thankfully our positions have now been reassessed. Now that women are being allowed to show their true potential as martial artists it not only dispels the belief that martial arts are sexist but also encourages other females to take up the sport, thereby ultimately swelling the ranks and bringing it even more to the attention of the general public. This creates more interest and can only promote the martial arts even further. Personally speaking, I find that my training in

early years by their coach, trainer, and mentor, Professor Canning, then their success would perhaps never have been achieved. Both Geraldine and Marguerite emphasize that you have to work hard to achieve the desired results. Nothing worth having comes easy, and in the martial arts this goes tenfold. Geraldine noted that being constantly under pressure in the dojo, and handling it, helps her in her day to day occupation. When stress situations arise in her office, she has only herself to turn to, but this sort of pressure is no problem, because she is used to it from her training sessions and is well able to cope.

Apart from busy tournament commitments, both girls have strong viewpoints on the delicate area of ladies' self defence. Marguerite feels that women should not just accept the fact that there is a possibility of being attacked. They should do something about it before it ever happens. She accepts the fact that not all women want to join a martial arts class, but believes they should at least prepare themselves in case the situation should ever arise, either by learning one or two simple tricks from father or boyfriend, or seeking out a short course of instruction run by experts. She also thinks that self defence should be taught to girls at schools, so that they grow up with a knowledge of how to handle a tricky situation.

Geraldine states that women should be taught a basic awareness

aimed at avoiding situations that put them in danger. For instance being alone at night walking home, is definitely not a good idea. She is presenting herself as a target, whereas a little thought beforehand can prevent a situation arising in the first place. If a woman joins some kind of fitness programme, not necessarily martial arts, her body will become stronger, and a fit person suddenly accosted, can run off. Escaping is half the battle; not many attackers will give chase to a woman running like a bat out of hell down the road, screaming her head off.

To stand your ground, in an

attack situation and have any physical contact with the attacker, means that you are going to get hurt in some way, even with self defence. But if you can run, then get the hell out of there. To stand and fight should be an absolute last resort.

Marguerite and Geraldine are both seriously interested in sports medicine when their fighting days are over. They would like to turn their energies in this direction, but until that day looms, they will continue to fly the banner of Mugendo, and vanquish all that come before them in the true tradition of the martial arts.

As the girl goes to her car (1) a would-be attacker prepares to move in on her (2) and grips her suddenly from behind. Instantly she raises her knee (3) and executes a back-heel to the groin, followed (4) by a quick elbow strike to the throat. 5. Choking, the attacker falls to the ground and the girl quickly makes her escape.

