

# mike JOLLIFF

**Steve Hobbs interviews Master Mike Jolliff  
of Five-Pattern Hung Kuen Kung Fu**

Steve is Mike's senior student and has trained under him for some 24 years.

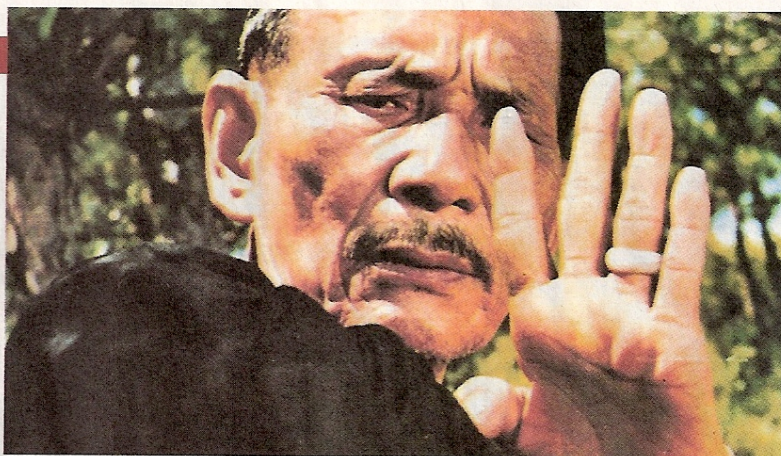
At the time of the Kung Fu boom in the early 1970s, Grandmasters were demigods who moved in close-knit circles and were respected not only by their students but the local communities as well. Over the years, icons such as Yip Man, Chan Hon Chung, Yuen Yik Kai and Hung I Hsiang have sadly passed away and, consequently, there are few martial artists who have ever had the opportunity to meet the Grandmaster of their system. One would think that to be invited for such a meeting would be a great honour, however, this interview gives an account of when Mike Jolliff was invited to see his Grandmaster and the lessons he brought back from Hong Kong.



**Steve Hobbs:** Mike, I've read your book about your career in martial arts and there are a few areas I would like to explore, in particular your first meeting with Grandmaster Yuen Yik Kai and how it came about.

**Mike Joliff:** It was quite an unusual approach really. It came about following an incident with a fighter from another style. It was back in 1981 following one of Vic's visits to the States (Vic Gnash was Mike's instructor). He had befriended a guy called Leroy who was keen to enter the Kong Sau (behind closed door fighting) circuit. Leroy's father was very wealthy and paid for a 'knowledge sharing' holiday in England. What that turned out to be was a two-week training session whereby at the end of the first week, Leroy

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had taunted me sufficiently for me to agree to fight him. This wasn't a particularly great idea since I knew that he wasn't a member of a school linked to the circuit and this would be frowned upon by the Grandmaster.

**SH: What style did Leroy practice?**

**MJ:** Predominantly White Crane. However, his father had paid for him to travel anywhere he wanted and he trained under many teachers. I think that's how he met Vic.

**SH: How good was he?**

**MJ:** His speed was phenomenal. The fastest I'd ever seen, in some techniques, even faster than Vic. I have to say that this worried me a bit. Neither he nor Vic would tell me much of his background, which I think was part of their strategy to get me to agree

to a contest. I remember praising Leroy's speed to Vic and in his typical unhelpful way he replied 'how old is your mirror?'

**SH: What did he mean by that?**

**MJ:** Although I didn't work it out at first, prior to training with Vic, I was no different to Leroy, as I had also made the mistake of not balancing my training. A good fighter follows the rule of 3, giving equal regard as follows: one third to speed, one third to power and one third to stance.

**SH: So why did you agree to fight him?**

**MJ:** When Vic had made up his mind about something - it was going to happen. The trouble was, I had got so fed up with Leroy that I wanted to fight him, if only to put him in his place.

**SH: Can you explain what happened in the fight?**

**MJ:** It was the weekend of the two-week session and we started at 10:00 am on the Saturday, Vic supervised the contest so we followed protocol and bowed first to him and then to each other. Leroy was really confident and couldn't wait to finish the fight as soon as he could. Proving to Vic that he was as good as he had been claiming.

To be fair, he caught me by surprise and hit me in the chest with one punch and on realising that it had got through, he launched a second. The trouble was, neither punch had any power behind them and simply bounced off me. I trapped his arms, drawing him into me and hit him in the throat, jerking his head back. He was stunned with this and offered

**DID YOU KNOW**  
Most of the kung fu practised today is said to have originated in the Shaolin monasteries on Songshan Mountain, in Northern China!





*Left*  
**Mike Jolliff and Steve Hobbs do battle**

*Below*  
**Take that Trapped arms and return strike to the throat**

**SH: What was Vic doing at this time?**

**MJ:** He was at the school with the Grandmaster, I later found out, getting a hard time!

**SH: Tell me about your meeting with Yuen Yik Kai.**

**MJ:** Vic had told me when to arrive and he met me at the club. He was already in his silk combat suit and looked as though he had been through a heavy session. He told me to get changed and train with some of the



an easy target for a Crane strike to his neck before I finished him with a Dragon's Tooth (or Phoenix Eye) strike to his throat. Needless to say he passed out.

**SH: What was Vic's response?**

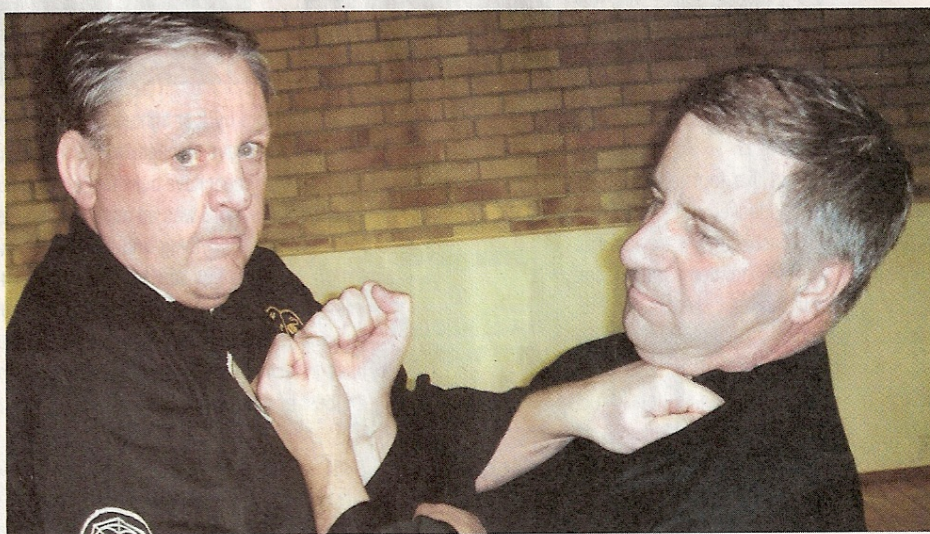
**MJ:** Smug. After he brought Leroy around, he spent some time explaining where Leroy had focussed too much on his speed and not enough on stance and weight of striking.

Vic also spent a long time putting Leroy's ego into place.

**SH: How did this fight lead to meeting the Grandmaster?**

**MJ:** It was about a year later, summer 1982, when Vic called me and said that the Grandmaster wanted to meet us both. At first I was a little worried. I knew that he wouldn't have been happy about the unofficial Kong Sau with Leroy but then I got a sense of confidence. I assumed that because I had been fighting so well and had asked to be taken off the circuit, that the Grandmaster wanted to meet me - I really felt more confident than I should have but I was really looking forward to going.

**SH: You said that you were in Hong Kong for**



**2 weeks, did you train at the Kowloon school for the whole time?**

**MJ:** No. It wasn't until the Wednesday of the second week that I was invited to go to the school.

**SH: Presumably Vic was showing you around Hong Kong for that time?**

**MJ:** No. He had to go to the school to meet the Grandmaster and I was left to train on my own. As far as seeing the sights, the Grandmaster sent his two nieces to be my tour guide.

*Above*  
**'Crane's Folding Wing' to the base of Steve's sternum**

*Right*  
**Leopard Paw to the collar bone**







club's senior students. I had been training with the students, who weren't that friendly, for about 20 minutes or so when the Grandmaster entered the room. It was really strange. I knew I could sense fighters from a distance but the energy Yuen Yik Kai put out was incredible. I had my back to a set of doors and before he entered, I felt my own internals turning my body as if I was going to defend against him. Then as he entered the room, my body was popping off like a firework display.



**SH: What was he like?**

MJ: He was about five foot seven inches tall, slight build and looked to be in his late '70s. As he approached me, it appeared as though he was gliding across the floor. Everything about the man was scary; I had never met anyone so intimidating just by their presence. His level of internals had made me realise that I was totally out classed, and by the time I would leave his school he would make sure that there was no misunderstanding of the pecking order.

**SH: What happened?**

MJ: Vic introduced me to him and he asked me to perform the five pattern-pattern (Dragon, Crane, Tiger, Leopard and Snake), which fortunately went well. He smiled and nodded an approval. Then he stood toe-to-toe with me and kicked me in the temple which floored me for some minutes. I had

Clockwise from top left  
**Mike defending against Tai Chi Sword**

**Grandmaster Yuen Yik Kai**

**Mike Jolliff (left) with the author of this article Steve Hobbs**

been hit before by fast fighters, frequently by Vic, but had always managed to see the attack coming. I might not have been fast enough but I always knew there was an attack. This time, I didn't pick up anything and his speed was simply breathtaking. You have to appreciate that he was in his late seventies and I was undefeated on the Kong Sau circuit. I was used to facing off against what I thought were the best of the best!

After I got to my feet, he instructed me to attack him. I was nervous by now so I attempted a back-fist to his temple that couldn't have missed - it did! He caught my

arm and threw me across the room; I got up and started to approach him. As I got closer I got weaker and at about five feet I collapsed and could get no closer - I was totally drained and felt physically sick.

He then moved towards me. I was scared and couldn't do a thing about it. I was helpless at the Grandmaster's feet.

**SH: What did he do then?**

MJ: He just smiled at me and then beckoned Vic over. His only comment to Vic was "Interesting student!" and then he left the room. At this point I really felt as though I had been put in my place but all things





considered, it wasn't too bad. I had received far worse kickings from Vic during a training session so I was starting to feel quite satisfied with myself.

**SH: But this wasn't the end was it?**

**MJ:** No. Vic told me to finish training with the other students, get changed and pay my respects to the

Grandmaster on my way out, at this point Vic left. For some reason I decided to pay my respects first and get changed later. As I approached the double doors my defences came on with no prompting. This meant danger on the other side of the doors. I entered the room cautiously and it was at this point I realised that I was in real danger. As I entered the room, two broadswords came down at me and as I got up from my evasion, it was obvious that I was in a trap. There were eight in total, all with traditional Chinese weapons and instructed to see me off. Sat at the edge of the room at a higher level were a number of elderly men eating rice with the Grandmaster in the centre.

The fight went on for a long time and by the end there was a lot of damage. I didn't come out unscathed but better than the others. The most difficult of the assailants was using a six-foot spear, he was skilled with the weapon and I just couldn't get near him. Fortunately, I was able to use one of the other attackers to shield myself and with the use of a pair of chopsticks, which I snatched from one of the onlookers; I managed to nullify him by jamming them into him just behind his collarbone and then took his ribs out with Tiger claws.

At the end of the fight when I was out of danger, the trance dissolved and I started to shake uncontrollably. The Grandmaster sent for Vic and he looked after me for almost four hours. I couldn't even speak properly. Vic explained that he

had been put through something similar earlier. Vic explained that the Grandmaster had heard of the unofficial contest with Leroy and had decided to make a point. A hell of a way to do it!

**SH: Was this your only meeting with the Grandmaster?**

**MJ:** No, I met him at my next Kong Sau contest a year

later - not long before he died.

**SH: What about during your visit in Hong Kong?**

**MJ:** Are you joking? I had no interest in meeting him again. I was quite happy to keep my head down and get out as soon as I could.

**SH: Apart from the obvious, what memories do you have from meeting Grandmaster Yuen Yik Kai?**

**MJ:** I realised that he was so much better than not only me but Vic as well. He had skills that I hadn't even heard of. He

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made me realise that there is a world of difference between a Master level and a true Grandmaster - as I said earlier, both Vic and I were completely out-classed.

I knew before I went to Hong Kong that he was very well respected amongst the Kung Fu circles but after meeting him I realised why, it's not everyone who can drop you from five feet and make you feel sick. Trust me, at that stage, you don't feel like fighting. It puts real meaning to the art of 'fighting without fighting'.

**SH: Mike, thanks very much and good luck with the book. ■**



### Steve Hobbs

For further information about Five Pattern Hung Kuen Kung Fu and events

tel: **07879422291**

email: **stvhobbs@yahoo.co.uk**

web: **www.exeterkungfu.co.uk**