

FMA

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Propagating the Filipino Martial Arts and the Culture of the Philippines

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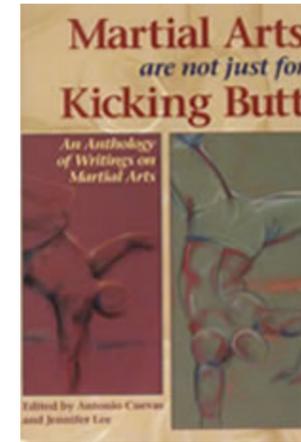
2012

From Sea to Shining Sea

An Historical Overview of the Filipino Martial Arts



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A literary anthology of original writings published by North Atlantic Books on the martial arts, featuring prominent authors such as George Plimpton, Bira Almeida, Richard Heckler, John Gilbey, Ron Sieh, Carol Wiley et al - covering boxing with Muhammed Ali, Capoeira, Aikido, Tai Chi Chuan and more. This includes the first major publication by Jeff 'Stickman' Finder on the history and current direction of the Filipino martial arts!

Jeff Finder has shared with the FMA Informative this writing however with the original title which was not used in the book and has added Footnotes so to update the article.

Jeff "Stickman" Finder has been practicing martial arts for 4 decades. He holds black belts in Kenpo and Chinese Chu'an Fa, and is a Guro in Cabales Serrada Escrima, which he has taught in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1986. Since then he has received honorary Masters Certificates from the WSEF (World Serrada Escrima Federation) and MACE (Martial Arts Cultural Exchange) Associations.

As a member of the 1st U.S.A. National Escrima Team in 1989, he went to the finals of the inaugural WEKAF world championship full-contact stick fighting tournaments in both Cebu and Manila, Philippines, and is a charter member of WEKAF. He served as treasurer on the first WEKAF board of directors elected in the United States, and has been a referee and judge for national and world championship Escrima competition in forms and fighting.

He is a regular contributor to online discussions, and has written articles about his experiences in the Philippines. He also wrote numerous articles for the FMAdigest and a column / editorial (Dinuguan for Brunch) for the regular issues from Vol5 No3 through Vol6 No4. Jeff received The Pantas ng Panulat (Master of the Pen) Award from the FMAdigest in 2010.

In 1998 he was inducted into the U.S. Filipino Martial Arts Hall of Fame for pioneering the use of durable synthetic weaponry through his company, Stickman Escrima Products (www.stickman-escrima.com).

Jeff also has his own Blog which you should visit to find further writings of interest: escrima.blogspot.com
You can also visit him on Facebook.

Each issue features practitioners of martial arts and other internal arts, other features include historical, theoretical and technical articles; reflections, Filipino martial arts, healing arts, the culture of the Philippines and other related subjects.

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Part 1: The Historical Setting

Southeast Asia: the words alone conjure images of thickly covered verdant jungle, steaming across the hilltops to meet deeply shining blue seas. From time immemorial, this is a land that has been shrouded in mystery. Beneath the jungle's canopy lie many secrets, of spices, herbs, and precious gems. Countless men have died trying to wrest these secrets from their hidden places, and many more to protect them. Even the sea lanes themselves have been guarded and defended, for along them have traveled the riches of several continents. Eventually these lands have given up their secrets, but among the last to yield have been the warrior skills that have held these territories for eons.

The human scale throughout much of this vast region is reduced to specific localities, separated from each other by hazardous terrain and by equally treacherous waters. Successive migratory waves have layered these lands with many competing ethnic groups, culturally and linguistically distinct from each other, often hostile to their closest neighbors.

Nowhere are these conditions more exemplified than in the Philippines, an archipelago of over 7000 islands stretching nearly 1000 miles. Located between 5 and 20 degrees latitude north of the equator, at the juncture of the South Pacific and South China seas and surrounded by smaller seas such as the Celebes and Sulu, the "Pearl of the Orient" has long been one of the world's great seafaring crossroads; a tropical realm of beauty and bloodshed.

Geographically, the Philippine Islands are divided into 3 main regions. Luzon and Mindanao are the two great islands to the north and south, respectively; in the middle are the Visayas, a region of countless smaller islands. Only a third of the Philippine Islands are inhabited, yet there are perhaps 700 different languages and dialects spoken; sometimes neighboring villages cannot even converse with each other, speaking not just different dialects, but entirely different root languages! The isolation of many villages and clans, separated by the sea and further insulated by jungle and difficult terrain, has created an environment of virtually perpetual small scale guerrilla warfare, in which competition for survival rewards the strong, with both land and sea swallowing the tracks of raiders, pirates and bandits. In such an environment, it is incumbent upon all to learn to defend themselves, or surely they will fall prey.

The earliest known inhabitants were small dark skinned people known as Negritos, who came to the region in the distant past. About 5,000 years ago they were forced inland in order to survive the onslaught of the next immigrants, the Indo-Australians. These, in turn, succumbed to successive waves of the fiercer and more advanced Mongoloid-Malayan race, starting around 100 BC. Each group that gave way got pushed back into rougher, more remote terrain that could more easily be defended, in the end creating an ethnic mosaic of mortal enemies across the land.

While the first immigrants are thought to have arrived by way of now long submerged land bridges, possibly connecting to Taiwan in the north and Borneo in the south, most inhabitants came as seafarers. In particular, the Malays carried a superb tradition of sailing that spanned the globe long before European explorers dared leave sight of land. From about the 10th century AD, Filipino seafarers made their mark from Africa to China, possibly even to the shores of South America. Traders, adventurers, pirates and slavers, they left evidence of their travels across 2/3 of the globe.

The Philippines were hardly remote, unknown islands prior to their "discovery" by the Spanish in 1521. The oldest legends come from the stories of Sinbad, which mention Mindanao and Sulu, and it is possible that the ancient Egyptian writer Ptolemy knew of them as the Maniola Islands. The Chinese wrote of them as early as the 3rd century AD, and maintained trade with them by the 5th century. Soon thereafter the Philippines came under the influence of the Hindu Sri Vishayan Empire, which reached there from the mainland through Sumatra and then Borneo. The early 1300's saw the Javanese Madjapahit Empire wrest control from the Sri Vishaya.

Most of this early history of the Philippines is Oriental, punctuated only by sporadic contact with Europeans. Marco Polo spent several months in Sumatra and the surrounding region in 1292, waiting for favorable weather to escort a royal bride from the court of Kublai Khan to the King of Persia. There are even legends from the southern Philippines that trace royal Moro lineages back to Alexander the Great, whose conquests extended well into India. While the Philippines were largely unknown to the people of the West, the reverse is certainly not true!

Part 2: The Art

While the first inhabitants of the islands undoubtedly had weapons and fighting skills for hunting and survival, the Filipino legend of the arrival of the art of Kali¹ begins during the waning days of the Sri Vishayan Empire in the late 13th century. Ten datus, or chiefs, fled from Borneo to the island of Panay in the western Visayas. Among their cultural contributions, which included laws, an alphabet and weights and measures, came Kali, an already ancient system of martial art based on the sword. The term Kali is often used to refer to the "mother art" that pre-existed the myriad styles one now finds spread across Southeast Asia. Some believe the word refers to the sword itself, called a kalis. Others say the term goes back even further, through Hindu influence to India and the ancient cult of the goddess Kali, who is always depicted with a sword in hand. As far away as Africa, the word kali means "fierce", certainly a quality ascribed to the warrior followers of the Black Goddess.

The original art has grown and evolved into a myriad of styles, known by a variety of names. Besides Kali, the two best known terms are Eskrima (*also spelled Escrima*) and Arnis. Both of these terms come from the Spanish. Escrima, used mostly in the central Visayas, means "to fence", and is also imbued with the meaning "to skirmish", while Arnis, the term most common nowadays throughout the Philippines, refers to the "harness" a swordfighter would wear to carry his weapons.

No matter what the name, several dominant characteristics stand out about the Filipino martial arts (FMA). Above all, they are pragmatic. These are fighting systems first, arts second. As such, they are eminently practical, discarding pretty moves in favor of a solid theoretical framework and simple, practical drills based on combat experience.

Weapons are featured to a greater extent than in almost any other martial arts. The FMA are unusual in that they teach weapons first and foremost. In a sense, this is more traditional than better known self-defense systems such as Karate, which teaches empty hands first and saves weapons for the practice of their senior disciples. Such arts were designed to meet the needs of societies merging into the modern era. The Filipino arts have not compromised their original purpose, instead retaining their full savage heritage of kill-or-be-killed.

Weaponry can be divided into a number of different categories, such as single or double weapons, long or short, rigid or flexible, combinations such as long and short together and projectile weapons such as the bow and arrow and the blowgun. Most fighting arts of the Philippines begin with the use of sticks, progressing to knives and swords. By starting students with weapons, these arts become deadly immediately, highly valuable in a society where danger constantly lurks. In such an environment, empty hands are considered a less practical alternative for fighting, so training evolves toward the most effective application of force, using tools to get the job done.

In the meantime, valuable lessons are learned about footwork and ranging as well as hand/eye, hand/hand and hand/foot coordination and timing. Patterns originally learned for stick and blade become the tactics for unarmed combat as well. This approach both simplifies and solidifies one's skills for practical self-defense. A final benefit is that the practitioner, having faced weapons everyday in training, develops the confidence and know-how to face weapons in real life, should the need ever occur. Overcoming one's fear can make a crucial difference when one's life is on the line!

In the old days, sticks were used to safely teach basics before students went to live steel. Possession of blades, however, was suppressed during the Spanish colonial period, particularly in the northern and central regions². Rattan, a cheap and plentiful vine, came to be the preferred material for training, with hardwoods like

Footnote: 1 - *There has been much controversy since this was written concerning the use and origins of the term Kali. This article was written using what information was available at the time it was published in 1998 by North Atlantic Books in the anthology "Martial Arts are not just for Kicking Butt" (ISBN 1-55643-266-6). The title of this essay was changed by the editors (without the author's permission) to "Filipino Martial Arts" (pages 139-156).*

Footnote: 2 - *The common belief that martial arts were suppressed by the Spanish has been challenged by research by Ned R. Nepangue, M.D. and Celestino C. Macachor, in their book "Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth" (Xlibris, 2007; ISBN 978-1-4257-4621-6). They point out how even in the Spanish era, local militias were organized, often under friars who were frequently retired soldiers (and hence experienced swordsmen) to combat attacks by Moro raiders.*

kamagung or bahi used for combat. Nowadays most arts focus on use of sticks, which some prefer over blades because of their bone shattering qualities. Lengths vary from 18-32 inches, depending on the characteristics of the system. Some styles specifically measure their stick proportionately to the practitioner's body size, such as the length of one's arm, though 28 inches is a generic "standard" size. Although the double stick is exciting to watch, with its intricate twirling patterns, the single stick is considered by most masters to be the "heart of the art" because it best teaches the tactical applications of techniques.

A somewhat unique and defining characteristic of the modern FMA is the practice of using numbering systems to teach angles of attack, and basing all defenses on understanding the principles of these angles. Whereas most martial arts might teach one technique for a punch, another for a sword, and a third for a kick, in the FMA these will be treated essentially the same if all three strikes are thrown along the same angle. This allows a fast, pragmatic integration of training for a wide variety of combat scenarios, including stick, sword, knife or empty hands. Many systems use 12 angles of attack, though styles that use more or fewer can also be found. The purpose of learning angles is to recognize incoming attacks, so that the mind remains calm while reflexes take over. A moment's hesitation can be fatal, so training strives towards instinct rather than intellect. Through this methodology, a good student can become combat proficient in a matter of months instead of years!

Training generally goes through several progressive stages. First comes learning the basic techniques for each angle. Almost from the start, these will be practiced with a partner, to develop a "live" feel by conditioning reflexes and timing. These techniques will then be incorporated into continuous movement drills. One such drill consists of a partner feeding a pattern of basic attacks while the other counters with defensive techniques. As skill progresses, this can be quite fast paced and challenging. Another type of drill is "counter for counter", in which one player responds to an attack with a defense and then counterattacks, thereby feeding a strike for his partner to defend, and so forth. This can be as simple as both players feeding the same strike and practicing the same defense over and over, or can be as complex as free sparring using the full arsenal of techniques in the system.

The Filipino arts often use geometric figures to teach and create techniques. For example, one should understand the combative application of shapes such as squares, triangles, circles, figure-8's and X's. The square, for example, can represent the target zone of your body. Footwork is often based on triangle, either male (focused straight forward) or female (stepping off-line of an incoming attack). Circles can be patterns of hand/weapon movement, or representative of the safety zone around one's body. A figure-8 is a circle inverted upon itself, creating an endless pattern of motion with blade or stick. 'X' visually represents the 4 most common slashes, found within the patterns of the combined downward and upward figure-8 twirls, plus a stab to the center where the lines cross. This is known as cinco teros, and represents the first 5 angles of attack within many systems.

While various styles use different numbering systems, angle #1 in virtually all of them is the right-handed downward forehand slash, striking high to the left side of the head, neck or collarbone. This is by far the most common blow delivered by humans wielding weapons. The next most common attack thrown is the #2, the reverse-angle high backhand to the same target areas on the right side of the opponent's body. Together these can be linked to create a figure-8 of continuous downward strikes. For every angle there are a handful of simple defensive techniques, but they cover all basic options for countering each attack. Techniques used against one angle may overlap effectively against other angles as well. This quickly builds versatility into the system. Later, variations are developed for each move, until the fighter is able to let reflexes take over. The highest goal is to be able to "flow" with an opponent, reacting instinctively at any speed.

This concept of flowing movement is embodied in a concept called Sinawali, meaning "weaving". Although commonly thought of as patterns for using double weapons, such as two sticks, this really refers to any concept of intricately coordinating the hands, and can be used for double long weapons, a single stick with check hand, or espada y daga, which is the use of a stick or sword in one hand combined with a knife in the other. Through extensive and integrated use of the off (non-primary weapon) hand, the Filipino arts are known for skills in checking and trapping an opponent's arms, along with disarms and joint locks.

The off-hand is commonly known as: the check hand, for checking the opponent; the live hand, for its "live" action; or the sacrifice hand, because you sacrifice it to save your life. In old days the Chinese referred to

certain methods of checking with an open thumb as "Filipino hand". Timing in FMA tactics is often a 3 count consisting of parry/check/strike. The use of the intermediate check in this sequence is disruptive of an opponent's timing and balance, controlling him to a significantly greater degree than the block/strike combinations found in many empty hand arts, and highly effective in setting up the finishing blow. The check hand accounts for the high degree of touch sensitivity developed in the training, which allows a fighter to reflexively control or redirect the energy of an opponent.

Styles from the Visayan region of the central Philippines are most often associated with these checking skills. Northern systems use the live hand to a lesser degree, basing their skills more on longer range stick-whipping tactics. Southern Filipinos from the Moslem regions of Mindanao and Sulu are mostly associated with use of sword or knife, having used their deadly blade work to preserve much of their independence and culture throughout the 334 years of Spanish occupation.

Part 3: Modern Times³

Traffic. It's different in the Philippines. An American wouldn't have a chance here. Drive down the street on the wrong side; it's O.K., and you can do it at night without headlights. That's O.K. too. Want to run a red light? As long as you can squeeze through, feel free to try.

It's no wonder that the martial arts of this country are so good. The whole culture is geared towards keen reflexes and awareness. The flow here is not just a martial art concept; it's a pervasive energy that one experiences continuously in daily life. Filipinos don't rush like Americans. It is not the speed at which things are done, but the intricacy with which they are interwoven that marks the character of the islands. Walking, driving, fighting or just hanging out, Filipinos are always engaged in a dance with life.

In 1989 I had the good fortune to visit the Philippines as a member of the 1st U.S.A. National Escrima team. This affiliation provided both a buffer against some of the more tiresome aspects of travel and a connection to the resident martial arts community. It is always more interesting to visit a place when the motivation for going there runs deeper than merely being a tourist, and the "1st World Full-Contact Escrima\Kali\Arnis Championships" in Cebu, Philippines provided just the kind of event to bring together a unique gathering of people with a deep common interest.

With delegations in attendance from 11 different countries, this was the gala debut of the Filipino martial arts onto the stage of late 20th century international fraternization. While the fighting arts of other Asian cultures have had their day in the sun, bursting into world consciousness and then blossoming through international organizations and media coverage, the Filipino arts have always seemed to be relegated to "the Next Big Thing". The Japanese arts came first, then those of the Koreans, both endowed with large numbers of American troops stationed on their soil throughout the Cold War era and imbued with strong cultural and organizational skills. They were supported, in some cases, by governmental sponsorship keen on the idea of commercialized cultural exports.

Bruce Lee's explosion into the public eye in the early 1970's provided the fuel to open the myriad of arts from China, Asia's dominant culture. On his coattails came exposure for lesser known arts which appeared in his films, such as Muay Thai from Thailand, which flourished, especially in Europe, because of its spectacular success in the ring. The Filipino arts, however, proved less accessible. Geared for combat, practiced in secrecy, hidden in remote and inhospitable venues, the arts of Escrima, Kali, Arnis, and many other names in tongue twisting local dialects, remained shrouded by myth and misconception. This was about to change, but the process would need nurturing.

Over in America, the groundwork was being laid by a handful of men. The change started slowly, in the small central California city of Stockton, an agricultural center in the San Joaquin Valley. This was home to the largest community of Filipinos in the United States for most of the 20th century, the majority of them farm workers and laborers who drew together in here in "Little Manila" for mutual support and sustenance. Stockton

Footnote: 3 - *The first four paragraphs of this section were mostly taken an article written in late 1989 for the Eskrima Review, an early but influential FMA newsletter published by Ed Abinsay and Leo Fernandez prior to the rise of popular internet forums.*

is a hot, dusty town, the kind of place where a dollar is hard earned. Although Filipinos have been a part of American history for centuries, plying the Manila trade as sailors on Spanish galleons, as pirates in the Caribbean, and even as the heroic crew for the pirate Jean Lafitte in the Battle of New Orleans against the British in 1814, theirs has been a largely unrecognized contribution.

Filipino immigration into the United States really began after the turn of the century, following the acquisition of the Philippines as an American protectorate in the Spanish-American War. Workers were brought to Hawaii and California to labor as field hands. Conditions were harsh, discrimination rampant. Women were largely excluded, so a generation of men lived lonely, communal lives. Not only were the Filipinos oppressed by their white employers, they also faced discrimination at the hands of the Chinese, traditional overseas rivals who had been established here longer, accumulating relatively greater wealth, and from the Mexicans, whose forefathers had once owned California, and who now competed for the same jobs in the fields. As a result, the martial arts of their homeland became transplanted into the farm labor camps as hardy young Filipino workers banded together for survival.

As in the Philippines, this communal imperative ensured that the art continued to flourish underground, hidden from outside eyes, only to be unsheathed in moments of high drama. This was war, not sport, so the common tools of everyday life became deadly weapons in skilled hands. Filipinos became known for prowess with knives, a reputation well earned in a thousand encounters. This was enhanced during WWII, when tough Filipino Scouts built a tenacious wartime reputation. In fact, during training under U.S. Army command, when Filipino recruits rebelled against the by-the-book bayonet tactics being taught in boot camp, the military sent a ranking officer to investigate. So impressed was he by the close-quarters blade fighting skills shown by these men, that he not only allowed them to follow their own methods but also recruited their best fighters to instruct trainers for other military units!

After the war, these men and many of their brethren veterans from the Philippines settled into life working the fields and orchards of California and in the fisheries up and down the Pacific coast. While Filipino communities sprang up everywhere, none was larger than Stockton's. It was here that the rebirth of Filipino martial arts flourished in America.

Among those responsible for this phenomenon, one name stands at the head of the class, that of Angel Cabales, known as "the Father of Escrima in America". In some ways, his is a story familiar to many of his generation. Born in 1917 on the Visayan island of Panay, he left the country of his birth in his early 20's to become an itinerant seaman, cannery worker, farm laborer and finally a farm labor contractor. What separated him from his compatriots were his exceptional skill in stick and knife fighting, and his strong will and fiery temperament.

At the age of 13, Angel was befriended by Felicissimo Dizon, arguably the greatest fighter in the Philippines in the 20th century. Angel became both friend and disciple, learning from Dizon the short stick art of DeCuerdas Escrima. They worked, lived and trained together in the rough waterfront districts of Manila, earning a reputation as "the Escrimador Gang".

As Angel's own reputation grew, he became a bodyguard and then special policeman, helping clean up trouble spots in this tough and violent environment. Making a name for oneself as a fighter soon led to challenges, and Angel had his share of "death matches". Sometimes pre-arranged, sometimes the result of spontaneous meetings, these bouts did not necessarily result in death of a fighter. Many ended with serious injury to or surrender by the loser, but with whirling sticks or thrusting blades, the threat of death was ever present. Smart and fast, Angel always emerged the victor, adding to his skill and knowledge from these encounters. None of his matches ever lasted more than a few seconds.

In 1939 he signed onto a freighter, leaving behind his homeland for ports from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. By 1941, he left this life behind to stay on the west coast of North America, from Alaska to Mexico, where he would build his reputation as a fearless and undefeated fighter until his natural death 50 years later.

By the early 1960's, Angel had settled into life in Stockton to raise a family. Here he was approached to open an academy for teaching the fighting arts of his homeland, and in 1966, with the help of his business partner Max Sarmiento, Angel opened the first commercial Filipino martial arts academy in the United States. What distinguished his Escrima academy was not just the curriculum, which was quite different from the Ka-

rate, Tae Kwon Do and Judo available elsewhere, but the fact that, breaking with cultural tradition, Angel opened his school to students of all races. For the first time, Filipino martial arts were being taught to "outsiders". This was a radical departure from the unwritten code that this knowledge was to be shared only with family members or other Filipinos.

In much the same way that Bruce Lee challenged the traditional framework of the Chinese martial arts community and had to fight for the right to teach whomever he chose, Angel Cabales came under fire from other Filipino martial artists who similarly felt betrayed by the prospect of outsiders learning their survival secrets. On several occasions he was challenged; as in the Philippines, he quickly sent his opponent packing. As word spread of his academy, students from throughout the central valley began to make the trip to train there. Angel soon realized that the harshly realistic training methods from the Philippines would not work as well in this new culture, so he reorganized the art he knew into a more structured teaching format and expanded the training with empty hands to complement the weapons. He then renamed his style Serrada, meaning "closed", to denote the tight characteristics that made it so effective for close-quarter fighting.

Once the door was open, other masters began to follow suit. They quickly realized that not only was this not a threat to their survival, but provided a new means of earning a living through their hard-won skills. Still, for many years word about schools for Filipino arts was hard to come by, and most students continued to be young Filipinos.

There were many Masters in Stockton, each with a different style. Some students would train first with Cabales, then later go to other instructors to learn their methods of stick or knife fighting. One such popular method, which contrasts with close-quarter systems like Serrada, is called Largo Mano, referring to any of a number of long range fighting styles. Largo Mano is generally defined as that fighting range where your head is beyond reach of your opponent's weapon, but his hands are within reach of yours. The other two ranges are medio, where both fighters can check each other's weapons and strike, and corto, which moves from body blows into grappling. Most styles cover all three ranges, but by placing different emphasis on the relative importance of each range they develop different sets of tactics and timing.

Among other popular Stockton teachers was Gilbert Tenio, who taught DeCuerdas as he had learned it from his father. This was related to Serrada, which contains DeCuerdas through Dizon⁴, retaining a tight, close-quarters efficiency. In their early days of working the farming camps, Cabales and Tenio had even been training partners, keeping their skills and those of others like them sharpened in order to survive the dangers of this new land. Other older masters chose to keep a lower profile, though benefiting from this resurgent popularity of their native arts among the younger generation of Filipinos. Foremost among them were Johnny Lacoste and Regino Ellustrisimo.

As a result, many of the early students from Stockton gained exposure to a variety of styles from different teachers. This was a departure from the Philippines, where one would learn different styles by fighting proponents of that style. In the old days knowledge was acquired by combat and only survivors learned. In America, barriers began to break down and knowledge began to flow more freely.

Meanwhile, about an hour west of Stockton by freeway, a new center of Filipino culture was starting to boom in Daly City, a bedroom community just south of San Francisco. Most of those who settled here were younger, more urban and better educated than those in the older community of Stockton. Daly City began to supplant Stockton as the center of Filipino community life in the U.S. during the 70's, as a new generation emigrated from both the Philippines and from the rural agricultural communities of the Central Valley. For a while Cabales taught classes on a weekly basis in Daly City, helping plant the seeds for growth of the arts in this area, but by far the largest and most influential school in the Bay Area was the Villabrille Kali Academy in South San Francisco, run by Ben Largusa.

Largusa is heir to the system created by Floro Villebrille, who studied many arts and combined them into

Footnote: 4 - *The DeCuerdas basis for Serrada is somewhat speculative. There are systems using this name in the Philippines, but there is no known connection to Serrada. On the other hand, the Decuerdas system taught by Grandmaster Tenio (and now his successor Arthur Gonzalez) in Stockton, Ca. explicitly includes Serrada as the basis for the numbering system and basic techniques. Tenio's Decuerdas contains elements of 19 systems, many learned from older Filipino immigrants whose histories are now forgotten.*

his own. Like Cabales, Villebrille also trained with Dizon. Unlike Cabales, who was 5'2" tall, Villebrille stood well over 6', so rather than specializing in close range fighting, Floro emphasized a longer range and mobility. Largusa's school in South San Francisco was for years the main center of this system outside of Hawaii, where Villebrille lived. Some of the students, who attended here, like their contemporaries in Stockton, would first learn one style, then go to Stockton to gain experience in one or more of the systems taught there.

While the first generation Masters laid the groundwork for preserving the Filipino arts in America, it was one man, Dan Inosanto, who more than anyone else helped propagate the worldwide growth of these arts. Dan, living in Los Angeles, was a black belt in Kenpo under the late grandmaster Ed Parker, who introduced him to the as-yet-unknown Bruce Lee. Ed also directed Dan to go back to his home town roots in Stockton to discover the arts that were his heritage. Thus began a lifelong quest to seek out and bring forth the knowledge of the old Masters.

Dan grew to prominence through his role as training partner for Bruce Lee, plus a film career of his own that began with a famous stick and nunchuk duel with Bruce in "Game of Death". After Bruce died, many fans in the martial arts looked to Dan to continue Bruce's fledgling system of Jeet Kune Do (JKD). JKD is actually a concept for learning, rather than a fighting system, so Dan turned to the Filipino arts as the best model for demonstrating these concepts in action. In addition, Dan published "The Filipino Martial Arts" in 1980, a book that became the bible of the subject. Through this work, people worldwide became aware of these beautiful, deadly arts and the men who were teaching them. Students began to flock to Dan's school in southern California, and through seminars and teacher certification programs, Dan reached out to communities around the globe, helping plant seeds of this art in places where it had never gone before.

As awareness of the FMA grew throughout the 1980's, coverage began to increase in the martial arts magazines. For the first time this created a wider exposure for many of the other masters. From the east coast of the U.S. one began to hear of established teachers such as Professor Visitation, creator of V-Arnis Jitsu; Amante P. Marinas, teaching Pananandata; and Leo Gaje, inheritor of his family's Pekiti Tirsia system. On the West Coast, belated recognition brought some of the old Masters their moment of glory, even bringing a few back from retirement to pass along and preserve their art.

By the mid 1980's, Filipino martial arts were entering a new phase. A new generation of instructors was beginning to spread the art, and interest began to grow in Europe, particularly Germany and England. Dan Inosanto was conducting seminars abroad, and his students such as Paul Vunak and Cass Magda began to make names for themselves through their teaching. Another student, Graciella Casillas, became famous as the only person to ever hold simultaneous world championships in both boxing and kickboxing. From the Cabales Serrada System came Jimmy Tacosa, Mike Inay and Rene Latosa, the latter two of whom created their own separate styles from this common root, and who eventually became better known in Germany than in their own home towns in California.

Video tapes became a new tool in teaching and promoting these arts. For the first time, folks living in areas without access to bona fide instructors could watch and practice with some of the best talent in the world. As the practicality of these arts became more apparent, the Filipino systems began to be everybody's favorite second art. Students of more traditional martial arts were intrigued by the fluidity and practical application of weapons. Tae Kwon Do practitioners in particular took to FMA for supplementary training. TKD is famous for kicking skills, not for hand techniques, and many found that the intricate traps and locks to be found in the Filipino arts were a perfect complement, filling in skills where theirs were weakest. This led to the growth of "seminar students", people who attended weekend seminars to learn drills, but who were not really devotees of the Filipino systems. Remy Presas, creator of Modern Arnis, made his reputation coast to coast across America, meeting the needs of students like these.⁵

The increased level of activity in the Filipino martial arts community did not go unnoticed back in the Philippines. The Masters there recognized the lucrative potential in the overseas market and began to reach out.

Footnote: 5 - Remy Presas was still building his reputation when this article was written. He would go on to worldwide renown, teaching seminars for years alongside partners George Dillman and Wally Jay. All three developed and grew synergistically in their arts through their association.

Among them were Ernesto Presas, younger brother of Remy; Edgar Sulite, of Lameco Escrima, and Dionisio Canete, a master with Doce Pares in Cebu. Many of these men became jet age teachers flying between the Philippines, the U.S. and Europe. More dedicated students began to make the trek back to the home bases in the Philippines, exposing the older masters still living there such as Eulogio and Cacoy Canete, Tatang Ilustrissimo, Jose Mena, Benjamin Luna Lema and others.

The most active organization to build a worldwide base was Doce Pares, based in Cebu. Dionisio Canete, a lawyer with political ambitions, channeled his considerable energies into developing an organization in the United States, beginning with Alfredo Bandalan's club in San Jose, California. As point man for this association, Alfredo organized the first U.S. National Championship tournament in San Jose in 1988 under the banner of NARAPHIL-USA, a recognized affiliate of the national governing board in the Philippines.

This event was the precursor to the creation of the U.S. National Escrima Team, which in 1989 would go to the Philippines as the official delegation to the organizing congress for the World Eskrima/Kali/Arnis Federation (WEKAF). This congress, held in Cebu just prior to the first World Championships, was attended by most of the prominent masters and grandmasters in the Philippines, who comprised the board of the government-sponsored martial arts organization NARAPHIL. The authority invested in this body for organizing and promoting the indigenous martial arts of the Philippines was rolled over into the new organization, WEKAF, which was duly chartered on Friday, Aug. 11, to promote the Filipino arts and competitions on a worldwide basis. The WEKAF congress ended with a pre-tournament motorcade parading through Cebu City, bringing forth the enthusiasm of the local populace and raising excitement to a level usually reserved in America for major sporting events. Attendance at the tournament would at times overflow from the seats onto the floor as Filipinos celebrated the homecoming of their art.

Part 4: The Crystal Ball

What's next for the Filipino martial arts? For years there has been an expectation that the FMA will be the "Next Big Thing" to hit the martial arts. There have been many trends in popularity since the 1950's: Judo, Karate, Tae Kwon Do, Kung Fu, Jeet Kune Do, Ninjutsu, Muay Thai, Kickboxing, Aikido, Brazilian JiuJitsu, etc. One thing seems certain, that in our fad-driven, short-attention-span high-speed world at the end of the 20th century, fads come and go faster all the time. On the other hand, a fighting art with the characteristics of the Filipino systems - fast moving, quickly decisive, easily learned - should fit into this lifestyle. Perhaps, though, it helps to turn the perspective around and look at where the art is now, and how far it has come.

Only 30 years ago, the Filipino martial arts were dying, the skills held tightly by a handful of old men and passed down to one or two family members in living rooms, if it was taught at all. Since then, the FMA have grown into an internationally recognized method of self-defense, with tens of thousands of practitioners worldwide in hundreds of schools and clubs. Magazines, some even dedicated solely to this subject, contain articles and ads for books, videos, sticks, clothing and association memberships. One can go onto the internet to discuss Filipino self defense arts and related topics. The most successful and respected online forum is Ray Terry's Inayan-Eskrima FMA Digest⁶. For information on signing up for free membership on the Eskrima Digest as a contributor or reader, go to "www.MartialArtsResource". There is also an FMA "FAQ", which provides information about many different styles and teachers and how to find instruction.

Full-contact competition is held in over a dozen countries, leading to national championships and placement in international competition. The goal, as envisioned by WEKAF Founder Dionisio Canete, is eventually to make it into the Olympics. WEKAF competition is fought in three 1-minute rounds. Fighters wear heavy Kendo-like helmets, padded jackets and gloves. Fighting is continuous full-contact and is scored like boxing, using a 10 point "must" system.

Meanwhile, smaller organizations are working on their own competitive formats, striving for rules that retain the combative flavor of the arts. Stockton's Eskrima Coalition, for example, developed a system of point fighting in which the referee stops the fighters upon contact. Points are awarded by consensus of the judges to

Footnote: 6 - After a 15 year run, the Eskrima Digest closed down at the end of 2009. There are many current online resources, such as MyFMA.net as well as different groups on Facebook.

the first fighter who makes contact in an exchange; 2 points for strikes to the head or weapon arm, 1 point elsewhere; first fighter to 6 points wins. The advantage of this system is that it rewards fighters for the initiative of landing the first blow while also encouraging use of defensive tactics.

The Classic Eskrima Championships, devised by Ronald A. Harris, represent yet another highly ambitious format. Several tournaments, held in San Diego in 1992, '93 and '94, introduced cultural and fighting aspects neglected in other competitions. In addition to forms, there was also traditional music and dance. Unique to these tournaments were fighting divisions not only for single stick but also double stick and espada y daga. Fighters were limited to minimal padding, which included helmets and light gloves, plus elbow, knee and groin protection. Unlike WEKAF, no padded jackets were used. Punching, kicking, takedowns and submission grappling were allowed in the single and double stick formats, helping raise the level of realistic contact.

Others are pursuing the limits of friendly full contact experience outside of the ring, most notably the "Dog Brothers Incorporated Martial Arts", Founded by Marc "Crafty Dog" Denny. The "Dog Brothers" host "real contact stickfighting" gatherings in parks, wherein participants are limited to use of fencing helmets and light gloves for protection. This is to increase realism, as opposed to the slugfests often engaged in by heavily padded fighters in tournaments. Footage from these gatherings is then used in video training tapes to demonstrate the finer points of applied combative power. The "Dog Brothers" motto is "Higher consciousness through harder contact"!

The variety of what can be found within the framework of these arts is limited only by imagination. Training books and videos⁷ are available for sticks and knives, in particular the balisong, a trademark 3-piece Filipino knife identifiable by its unique hinged split handle that swings over the blade as the sheath. Skilled players can whip this knife open or shut one handed with blinding speed, an intimidating show of manual dexterity. Lesser known is the Filipino whip. The whip first gained notoriety through exhibitions by the late Snooky Sanchez of Hawaii, who was famous for his blindfolded demonstrations of accuracy. Other proponents of this weapon include Dan Inosanto, Sonny Umpad⁸ and Tom Meadows, the latter a teammate of mine in the Philippines in 1989 who is now producing books and videos on this subject⁹.

The truth of the matter is that these are not arts that will ever appeal to the general public. They just look too intimidating for the average person to imagine doing themselves. As an instructor in Serrada since 1986, I've seen big, tough full-contact fighters come to watch a class and walk away muttering about how crazy we are. Ironically, these arts are actually safer and less painful to learn than most empty-handed systems. Unlike those programs, where students regularly punch each other and bang together arms and legs, the FMA are generally taught stick-to-stick for safety. Sticks feel no pain, so there is relatively little need for body conditioning to learn the art. At most, one will occasionally get a knuckle popped, though training does carry the caveat of practicing carefully. Of course, advanced sessions get much faster and more aggressive, but by then practitioners should know what to do, and safety gear like helmets and gloves are sometimes used when testing the limits of control.

The FMA have other characteristics that lend themselves to effective modern self-defense: The training teaches one skills that can be used with any improvised weapon in an emergency, or with no weapon at all; by facing a weapon in training, one overcomes fear of this and learns how to handle the situation; almost all training is done with a partner, building sensitivity and reaction to another's movement. As I like to tell my students, "the hand is faster than the eye, the stick is faster than the hand", so this develops exceptional reflexive speed. These arts take little strength, since weapons are equalizers, making this a good art for women to know.

The Filipino arts cross boundaries with almost all other methods of self-defense. Based in sound combative principles, one can see direct correlations between the FMA and almost any other art, such as Muay Thai, Wing Chun, Tai Chi Chuan, Jujitsu or Aikido. The Filipino arts are versatile and effective, allowing a continuum of options ranging from control of an opponent to complete destruction. Their simple angle-based structure

Footnote: 7 - YouTube has become a popular online venue for posting promotional and training videos.

Footnote: 8 - Sonny Umpad passed away on August 24, 2006.

Footnote: 9 - Tom Meadows book "The Filipino Fighting Whip" was published by Paladin Press in 2005, with a foreword by Dan Inosanto (ISBN 978-1-58160-477-1).

makes the FMA quick and easy to learn. As mentioned, these aspects make training in the Filipino martial arts quite popular as a secondary style among those in other forms of martial art. Through FMA, they can effectively fill in gaps in their knowledge and enhance the skills they already have. Concepts of angulation and joint lock/controls, borrowed from Filipino martial arts systems, are more and more finding their way into police training, to increase effective levels of response, for officer safety, and to limit liability risks from excessive use of force.

The percentage of students within the martial arts who will dedicate themselves to the Filipino arts will probably remain small. In spite of its growth, the arts of Eskrima/Kali/Arnis will always be strong drink, not to everybody's taste. Except for places like California and the Philippines, which have large Filipino populations, it is still often difficult to find qualified instruction on a regular basis. Nevertheless, as we end the Second Millennium, we find that the savage fighting arts of seafaring pirates have come to find acceptance, and even some respectability, in our modern age. Perhaps this is due in part to the romantic image of swashbuckling, and the adrenaline charge that comes from a spirited bout of sparring with 100 mile-per-hour sticks.

Much respect for the effectiveness of these arts comes straight from the streets, where survival is all that counts. It is a paradox that our era of relative peace and prosperity is also one of the most personally dangerous in history. Aside from the proliferation of firearms, there are many places where the knife is weapon of choice, such as in countries locked in poverty, or inside prisons anywhere. Knives are silent killers, and wicked intimidators. The Filipino fighting arts, based on weaponry and skills against it, are adept at handling such problems both physically and psychologically. Such skills have been honed for generations, with blades in barrios, from waterfronts to worldwide exposure.

The magnificent and efficient fighting arts of the South Seas have finally been let out of the proverbial bag, to take their place on the world stage among the great fighting systems of other cultures, and to shine as a true gift of knowledge from the Filipino people.

Source materials for the original article:

Swish of the Kris by Vic Hurley

Jungle Patrol by Vic Hurley

The Filipino Martial Arts by Dan Inosanto

Special thanks to the many people who have helped train me in these arts, in particular my teachers, Great Grandmaster Angel Cabales, and Grandmaster Anthony Davis, who helped open the door.

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The schools listed teach Filipino martial arts, either as the main curriculum or an added curriculum.

If you have a school that teaches Filipino martial arts, or you are an instructor that teaches, but does not have a school, list the school or style so individuals who wish to experience, learn and gain knowledge have the opportunity.

Be Professional; keep your contact information current. - **Click Here**



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