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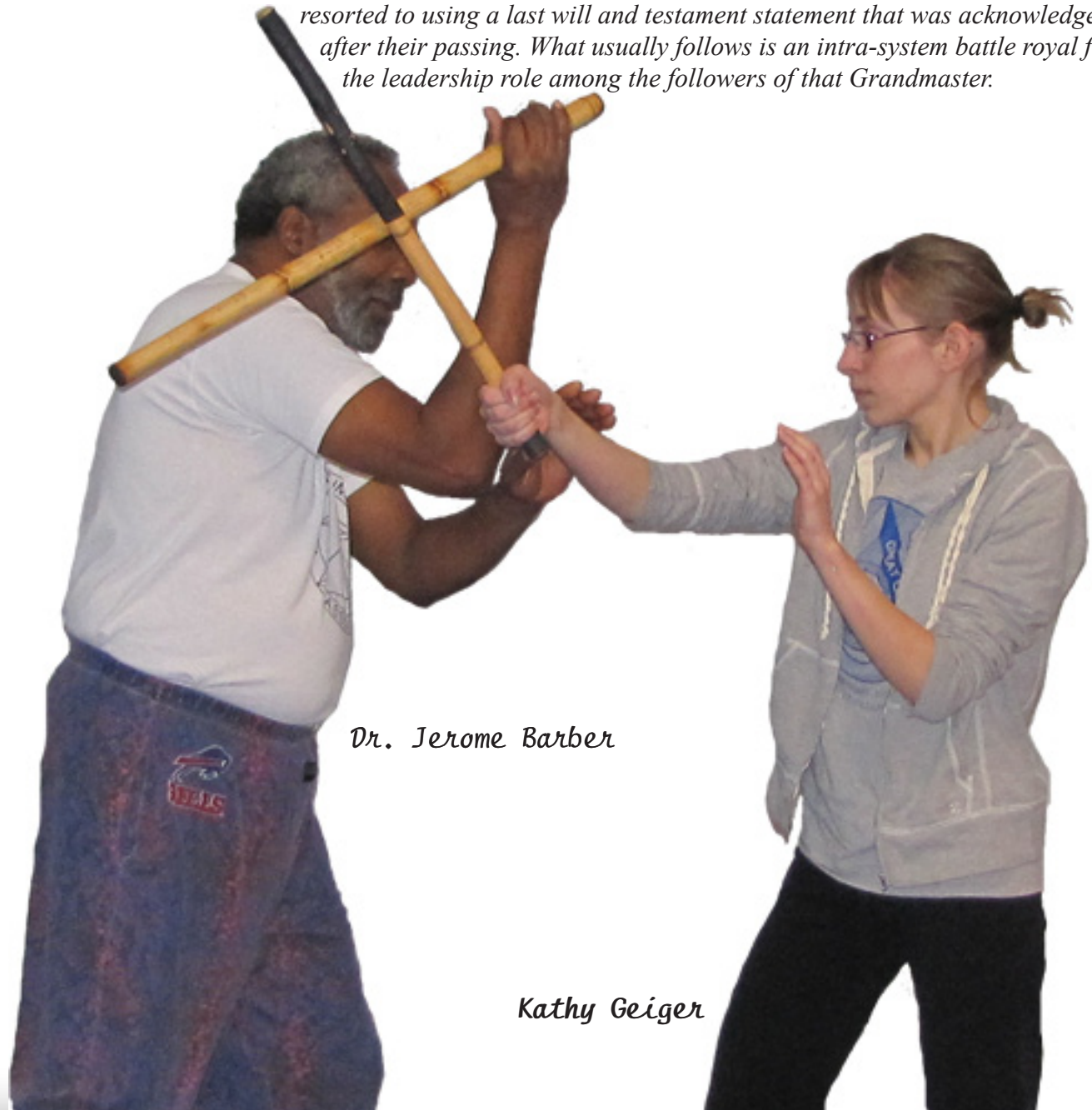
Propagating the Filipino Martial Arts and the Culture of the Philippines

Informative Issue No. 108  
2014

## Cuentada Drill of the Modern Arnis System

### Thoughts on Successors & Disciples

*So many Grandmasters have failed to name a successor and still others have resorted to using a last will and testament statement that was acknowledged after their passing. What usually follows is an intra-system battle royal for the leadership role among the followers of that Grandmaster.*



*Dr. Jerome Barber*

*Kathy Geiger*

**Cuentada Drill – Modern Arnis System**

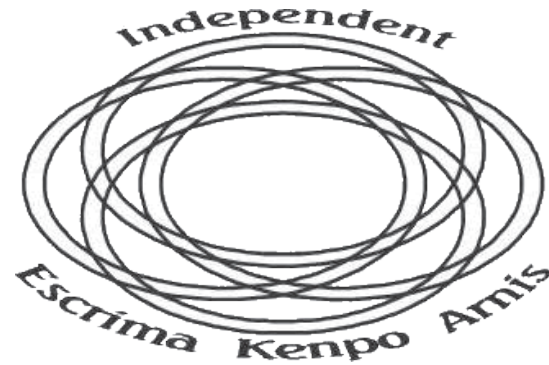
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Independent Escrima-Kenpo-Arnis Associates

It is always a pleasure to have Dr. Jerome Barber contribute something to the FMA Informative. If you are unfamiliar with his writings you might want to check out FMA Informative Issue #17 “FMA History in Buffalo New York,” ([Click Here to Download](#)) and Dr. Barber has written quite a few articles for the FMA Informative newspaper, however it is thought that his article “Master Teacher: An Expository Essay in Leadership” the lead article for FMA Informative newspaper Vol2 No.6 - 2013 ([Click Here to Download](#)) was really excellent and tells it like it is on the subject of being a Master Teacher.

In this issue Dr. Barber explains a section the “Cuentada Drill.” (Note: Cuentada drill; a stick against stick continuous training loop that is used to sharpen the defending and counter-striking skills of students who are studying a Filipino style stick fighting method, in particular, the Balintawak Eskrima System.) However Dr. Barber will explain some insight into the thoughts of Professor Remy Presas and what he taught for this drill.

The second section in this issue is Dr. Barber's personal thoughts on successors and disciples, using Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo as a reference. You have to read and understand the article to grasp what has happened to some arts due to the Grandmaster that has passed away did not designate a successor or the main disciples, which when this happens turns the art into a political mess.



**SE Asian Martial Arts**

The SE Asian Martial Arts blog is an open discussion venue dedicated to the exchange of information involving the South East Asian Martial Arts such as Escrima, Arnis, Pentjak Silat and Kuntao Silat in particular as well as other Asian martial arts in general. Our goal is to give our blog writers and readers a forum that encourages our members to share information, techniques, seminars dates and training camp dates.

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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## Cuentada Drill – Modern Arnis System

The Modern Arnis system was founded and established in 1957 by Remy Amador Presas. Professor Presas blended three Filipino stick or blade fighting methods, Crossada, Palis-palis and Balintawak Eskrima to create his own hybrid system of self-defense. He had learned the Crossada and Palis-palis methods by his paternal grandfather Leon B. Presas. Both of these methods utilized the espada y daga (sword and dagger) style of fighting and the Balintawak method was essentially a single stick fighting method. Three (3) men have been credited with teaching Professor Presas the Balintawak method, Rodolpho Moncal, Temeteo Maranga and Venancio Bacon, the system's lead teacher. In this essay I am going to concentrate on one training aspect within the Balintawak Eskrima system - cuentada - as it brought over from Balintawak and modified for use in the Modern Arnis system by Professor Presas.

The cuentada drill is a stick against stick continuous training loop that is used to sharpen the defending and counter-striking skills of students who are studying a Filipino style stick fighting method, in particular, the Balintawak Eskrima System. Most Modern Arnis instructors in the USA and Canada do not teach the cuentada drill because Professor Remy Presas, the Founder of Modern Arnis did not teach the full drill on a regular basis during his 25 year instructional career outside of the Phil-

ippines. He did however, taught an abbreviated version cuentada that he alternately referred to as "Give and Take Drill", "Combined Give and Take Drill" or "6 Count Drill". A small number of his Modern Arnis senior students between 1975 and 1999 were taught the full stick training drill and Professor specifically referred to the drill as "cuentada". My instructor, Sifu Don Zanghi, was taught the full cuentada method in 1985 and 1986. Sifu Zanghi later taught the cuentada drill to Duane Brown and me in 1987 after I opened the Erie Community College Self Defense Program. At that time Duane was my senior student at the college.

It is very likely that Professor chose not to teach the full cuentada drill initially because there were so few Americans or Canadians who had any exposure to the Filipino martial arts before he came to the USA in 1975. He was literally teaching something that many people viewed as a "new" and "exotic" martial arts in the Western World of 1975. Judo, Jiu-jitsu, Karate and Kung Fu were the premier Asian Martial Arts that westerners knew about and could relate to; however, Arnis or Eskrima were still hidden from the general public's view and thus unknown to those of us who were unfamiliar with the people and culture of the Philippines. The Filipino martial arts were being taught in closed door, secret locations, known only to the students of the few instructors mainly in

Hawaii and California before 1975. Additionally, most, if not all of the students were Filipino or Filipino-Americans.

When Professor Presas first began teaching his Modern Arnis system in the USA in 1975, he elected to use the open seminar format as his instructional venue and he worked primarily within Kajukenbo and Kenpo circles. This decision was based on the fact that he was first sponsored in the USA by Grandmaster Max Pallen, who owned and operated a series of Kajukenbo schools in California around the San Francisco Bay area. One of my good friends, Punong Guro Eddie Lastra, the lead instructor of the Sayas-Lastra Arnis System, attended several Professor Presas seminars in 1975 and 1976.

Since most of Professor Presas' initial students would be drawn from the Kajukenbo and Kenpo systems, many of whom had little to no stick fighting training, he had to stress the basic elements of his Modern Arnis system. He had to begin with basic and elementary directions on how to hold the stick, how to swing the stick, the impact target areas on the opponent's body as well as the stepping or footwork patterns for attacking and defending. These initial students were not ready for the full cuentada drill because they did not even know the basic block-check-counter method of Modern Arnis stick fighting.

Professor Presas taught the 12 strikes of his system in conjunction with the following specific body target areas and assumed that the stick was the student's right hand:

1. Horizontal forehand to the opponent's left temple
2. Horizontal backhand to the opponent's right temple
3. Diagonal forehand strike to the opponent's left clavicle (collar bone)
4. Diagonal backhand strike to the opponent's right clavicle (collar bone)
5. Stick thrust (stab motion) to the opponent's navel/solar plexus
6. Overhand stick thrust to the opponent's left pectoral (chest) region
7. Reverse overhand thrust to the opponent's right pectoral (chest) region
8. Downward diagonal backhand strike to the opponent's right knee
9. Downward diagonal forehand strike to the opponent's left knee
10. Overhand thrust to the opponent's left eye
11. Reverse overhand thrust to the opponent's right eye
12. Downward vertical strike to the opponent's crown/ forehead

### Basic Block – Check – Counter Drill

Once the stick striking method is learned the student must next learn how to defend against those same 12 attacks, therefore the 12 corresponding stick blocks and empty hand defenses were taught. In Modern Arnis the primary defensive technique against a weapons attack is the three (3) part sequence known as block-check-counter, which can be performed both with a stick as well as empty handed.

Each of the 12 Modern Arnis stick strikes is assigned both a number and a specific body target to be struck when that number is called out. Each of the stick strikes are first practiced in the air with the instructor calling out the strike number. Next the students practice each strike in the air but with a person standing just beyond actual stick striking range. Each strike is aimed at the correct target area of the opposing person's body, without any contact being made. The next drill allows the student to very lightly touch the other person's body with the tip of their stick.

This phase of the training is to insure that the students know and actually are striking at the correct body target area that corresponds to the numbered strike that was called out by the instructor.

After the students have been taught the 12 single stick strikes they are then shown the corresponding single stick blocks for each stick strike, plus the evasive footwork patterns needed to defend against each of the strikes. In addition the students are taught the use of the checking hand and counter-striking techniques. The block-check-counter sequence is the basis for all of the Modern Arnis defensive tactics involving the stick as well as empty hand situations. The defensive footwork sets up and provides full body power for the counter-strikes. Forward angled steps to the right or left were the primary evasive steps that Professor Presas taught and these steps usually positioned the defender ideally to use the middle portion of his/her stick to block at the point of attack against their

opponent.

The corresponding defensive stick blocks and evasive movements of Modern Arnis are in the same sequential order as the stick strikes. After a brief period of solo practice with the blocks, the students begin working with a partner who feeds them the stick strikes from 1 to 12 in sequential order. The students must execute the block-check-counter format correctly as they learn to defend against incoming stick strikes. They then respond with appropriate counter-strikes.

If a student is unable to successfully engage in the basic block-check-counter drill, they should be held back until they can perform this basic and necessary drill correctly. Only after gaining mastery over the basic block-check-counter drill will the student be ready for and capable of moving on to the give and take or six (6) count drill and ultimately the cuentada or counter for counter drill.

## 6 Count Drills / Counter for Counter Progressions:

The 6 Count drill as taught by Professor Presas in Modern Arnis is a series of “give and take” movements designed to enhance body shifting, footwork, checking hand effectiveness, stick blocking, evasion of incoming attacks and efficient counter- striking. The drill is open ended and continues until the coach or instructor signals that the drill is to end. This drill is shown on the 1986 video series in volume # 4. The drill is also presented in Professor’s 1983 book under the title “*Combined Give and Take Drill.*” (Presas, 1983, pgs. 90 - 93)

There are 3 strikes that each person will use in the Modern Arnis 6 count drill, #1, #8 and #12. I have seen and worked with some instructors who teach the drill with strikes #3, #8 and #12 or strikes #1, #4 and #12.

There are not any significant differences in the use of these patterns. The general concepts with the drills remains the same, it is a block - check - counter practice sequence. One of my good friends, Grandmaster Bram Frank, “*Common Sense Self Defense/Street Combat,*” also uses another six (6) count drill block - check - counter sequence with strikes #2, #3 and #12. He teaches the drills while utilizing a single knife attack as well as the standard single stick attack mode. Below is a photo sequence showing the standard six (6) count drill sequence:



**Figure 1.** The drill begins with an overhead downward or number 12 strike



**Figure 2.** The defender uses an umbrella slant block with a braced support



**Figure 3.** The defender counters strikes using a horizontal number 1 strike



**Figure 4.** The attacker defends against the number 1 strike



**Figure 5.** He then counters with a low back-hand strike (No.8) to the knee



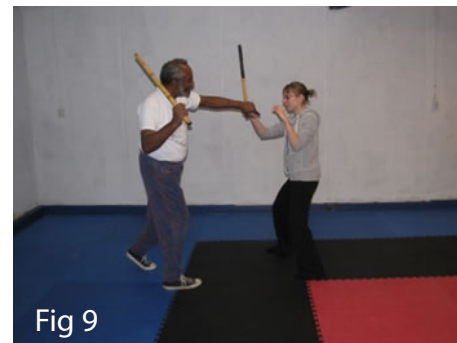
**Figure 6.** The defender uses a drop or downward stick block and hand check in defense



**Figure 7.** The defender makes an overhead counter strike after her low block



**Figure 8.** The attacker defends against the 12 strike with an umbrella/slant block



**Figure 9.** The attacker prepares to counter with number 3 strike while hand checking



**Figure 10.** The defender has blocked the strike using a braced inward stick block



**Figure 11.** The defender has made a low back-hand strike to the attacker's right knee



**Figure 12.** The attacker makes a drop/downward stick block with a downward hand check; repeat.

Once the basic 6 Count Drill is understood and the student becomes proficient at it, the instructor begins to add stick thrusts, checking hand slaps, punches, grabs, pulls and pushes. The student must become familiar with and react to the different angles of attack that an opponent can use. The drill allows the student to learn how to face and defend against each new strike in a structured and safe training environment.

Since the give and take or six (6) count drill is designed and intended to be an endless practice loop, there is not a winner or loser. This is strictly a practice drill where repetition is stressed for the purposes of improving stick blocking skills, checking hand skills, evasive footwork and counter striking skills in a controlled environment. This is not a sparring drill because all of the strikes are pre-arranged and known to both partners. Each new element that will be added is explained and taught in advance. Adding the #2, #3, #12 striking sequence adds balance to the drill by teaching the student to defend both sides of their body as well as their head. I have added the #2, #9 and #12 striking sequence to match the original standard sequence as shown above. In the photo sequence below, I have added a thrust strike which my partner defends and then counters:



**Figure 13.** After making the drop-block the attacker could insert an upward thrust which is defended against with a mid-level umbrella block and body-shifting rear left step



**Figure 14.** The defender has used a mid-level umbrella slant block and counters with a backhand overhead downward #12 strike



**Figure 15.** The attacker shifts to his left, parries inward with his left hand and uses a reverse slant or wing block to defend himself



**Figure 16.** The defender makes an overhead umbrella/slant block to defend herself against the forehand overhead #12 strike.

In the free and open sparring that follows the expanded 6 count drill training, all of the skills acquired within that drill must be put to use with the added goal of simulating a strong finishing strike to end a real and serious street encounter. This training process is preparation for a real street confrontation against someone intent on doing grave bodily harm. The goal of the basic 6 count drill and the expanded adaptations is to give the student the skills needed to end the street encounter quickly, preferably within the very first exchange of blows.

The 6 count drill theory was taken from Professor's training in the Balintawak System of Arnis style as taught by the late Grandmaster Venancio Saavedra Bacon. Professor adapted his Balintawak training to develop the speed and coordination training of his senior Modern Arnis students. It was a prelude to the more complex skills needed for self-defense against a trained stick fighter from another system. Early to middle levels of Modern Arnis training does not adequately train students to fight against other stick fighters. The early to mid-level training is self-defense oriented with an added emphasis on developing a good artistic presentation of the art. The training can be used very effectively to counter and defeat people using empty hand attacks or armed attackers who have limited knowledge and/or experience with a blunt weapon such as a stick.

The latter statement should not be construed in a negative manner. After all is said and done, everyone needs a starting point for every new endeavor that they begin. I am simply putting Modern Arnis training into my own per-

spective and showing why the 6 count drill is taught to intermediate students rather than beginners. These students are then taught the expanded 6 count drill as preparation for the cuentada or counter for counter method that will follow. There are a number of skill requirements that must be mastered before the counter for counter (cuentada) training can be fully engaged in and understood.

### The Cuentada Drill

At the 1990 Modern Arnis Summer Camp that I hosted in Buffalo, NY, Professor Presas formally taught the cuentada or counter for counter drill with the assistance of a fellow from Vancouver, BC, Canada, named Fred Shadian. Most of the camp participants were seeing this single stick cuentada format for the first time. My senior students, Richard Curren and Tom Verga were very comfortable with the new drill, because we had been practicing it for some time as they were approaching the time for their black belt tests. What we were missing in our training were the stick stoppages and joint-locks that Professor taught in the 1995 to 2000 period as Tapi-Tapi. This latter locking phase of the cuentada/counter for counter/tapi-tapi format is the basis for the "*Master of Tapi-Tapi*" title that some people in Modern Arnis now hold.

The counter for counter training is aimed toward developing the mastery of techniques and integrating them with faking, baiting, evasion and countering movements that flow naturally from the training as well as each individual's own personality. Ultimately the desired goal of counter for counter training is to apply

the cuentada concepts in order to defeat the opponent as quickly as possible without getting yourself hurt during the confrontation. In the final analysis, counter for counter training should be less about using a particular or favorite techniques than it is about being able to apply the concepts in a non-structured confrontational situation. It is an acquired ability that allows the Modern Arnis player to control or manipulate his/her opponent, thereby forcing that opponent to make certain moves which in turn allows the Modern Arnis player to end the encounter favorably and on his/her terms.

A Modern Arnis instructor who is teaching "the art within your art" concepts, should be able to bring out the very best in most of his/her students, because the basic 6 count drill and subsequent expanded 6 count drills lay out the foundation that leads to the counter for counter training that will follow. "The "*art within your art*" approach to Modern Arnis is structured around the idea that any prior training that each student brings with them is the starting point for their Modern Arnis instruction. Nothing should be taken away from the student because "*the art within your art*" conceptual model should enhance and add to the student's existing knowledge base as they train within Modern Arnis, thereby, making the counter for counter (aka cuentada or tapi-tapi) training the personal expression of their overall training experiences within the martial arts.

According to Ama Guro Bryant, the cuentada or counter for counter training connects the senior Modern Arnis students to the older Balintawak Eskrima style. Cuentada training comes

late in Modern Arnis, because it is a tough and mentally difficult aspect of training. Cuentada training is based on prior knowledge, skill, deception and guile. (Bryant, *Inside Karate*, p. 33). In reality the cuentada (aka counter for counter or tapi-tapi) can only be taught effectively in a one on one situation. It does not work as well as a group teaching methodology. While it can be presented at a seminar and in group instruction as a drill, the cuentada drill requires sensitivity, balance, quick reflexes and a sound grounding in the basics of the art. The dynamics of the cuentada exchanges will differ each time as one's training partners change since each individual has his or her own personal style of movement and intensity that comes out when engaged in the free flowing practice sessions.

The cuentada or counter for counter single stick drills as taught in some Modern Arnis schools is designed to prepare the students to face and defend against a trained stick fighter. This training method utilizes a 'coach and student' format and the training begins after the student has gained a thorough understanding of the basic block-check-counter single stick system consisting of strikes one (1) through twelve (12).

### The Cuentada Training Phases

There are two phases of training in the Modern Arnis cuentada method. The first phase consists of the coach delivering the twelve strikes in sequential order and the student defending each strike with a stick block and then counter-striking. The coach will block the student's counter-strike and then go to the next strike in the sequence until he/she has reached

the 12th strike. The sequence is then repeated until the student is becomes very proficient in his/her defensive actions including their footwork, body shifting, stick blocks, hand checks and counter-strikes. Usually the student will need 8 to 12 weeks of training to develop a fluid and precise response to the coach's strikes. Very often the cuentada drill is the first time that the coach or training partner has consistently and deliberately blocked the student's counter-strikes, as well as making a counter strike of their own in return. This drill usually comes after some 12 to 24 months of previous Modern Arnis training on how to employ the basic block-check-counter defensive sequence with the single stick, empty hands and double sticks. The student is now facing a new challenge... their opponent is now actively defending and retaliating against the student's initial defensive actions. The continuous non-stop exchanges between coach and student adds a new level of realism to the training methodology.

The second phase of the cuentada drills consists of the coach delivering the initial stick strike which opens the drill to any part of the student's body. After blocking the initial strike, the student must counter-strike and the coach blocks the student's counter-strike, then he/she will deliver a return strike in random order to any part of the student's body. This training phase is closer to an actual fight situation because the student does not have any idea where the coach will attempt to counter-strike immediately after making his/her own blocks.

It should always be kept in mind that Modern Arnis is a

blended or eclectic Filipino martial art style as founded by the late Grandmaster, Remy Amador Presas, in 1957 (*Mitchell, Inside Kung Fu*, 1991, p. 61). Professor Presas, based the art on some traditional or common stick / bladed striking systems such as banda y banda, redonda x, up & down, figure 8, abanico, rompida and sinawali.

These striking patterns are used to familiarize the Modern Arnis student with some of the core elements of other Filipino fighting arts. Therefore the coach in the cuentada drills has the full range of stick strikes previously taught to the Modern Arnis student to utilize in his/her responses during the second phase or random striking sessions of the cuentada training.

The student should follow the same behaviors and utilize every striking method that he or she has mastered during their previous training time in Modern Arnis as well as any other martial systems that they have learned previously. Modern Arnis as designed and taught by Professor Presas was intended to be flexible and adaptive. The art was supposed to fit around the student. Professor Presas encouraged his students to adapt and alter Modern Arnis techniques to fit themselves. He would often tell us in seminars and camps that we should "...make it for yourself." The cuentada drills and random training sessions were the places where every student could and should begin to make this art fit their own bodies and movement preferences.

Since Professor Presas viewed the twelve striking techniques as the life and soul of Modern Arnis, mastery of those strikes and defenses are paramount within the art. He believed that everything

else in the system hinged around the 12 strikes, thus the cuentada is a natural and logical extension of the striking system. The bottom line of this essay is quite simple; the cuentada/counter for

counter drill is the opening phase of gaining mastery within the art of Modern Arnis. It is a very important skill set that must be developed before a student can become highly proficient in the

art of Modern Arnis. The primary function of the cuentada drill is to prepare the student to face a skilled Filipino martial arts stick fighter.

Balintawak Original Saaverda Style of Eskrima”.

As I stated above Grandmaster Bolden, Grandmaster Pierre and Master Vargas are friends who I have trained with over the past 24 years and who I greatly respect for their skills and abilities in Modern Arnis. The fact that these men these men are being acknowledged by Grandmaster Atillo with the highest honor of being both Successors and Disciples, speaks volumes regarding their martial arts skills, personal dedication and integrity. This award recognition is doubly impressive for me because of the fact that Grandmaster Bolden and Master Vargas is a teacher-student pairing. This is as far as I can recall in my 35 year career in martial arts the first time that I have seen or heard of a teacher-student pair being promoted at the same time and within the same organization.

I have noted above that Bolden, Pierre and Vargas are the only Modern Arnis trained people on the Atillo successor listing. This is quite significant because most of the so-called Modern Arnis leaders in the post-Remy Presas Era that began in 2001 after the passing of the system founder and Grandmaster have studiously avoided acknowledging or working with these three men.

All three of them have been characterized as minor or marginal players in the Modern Arnis world, in spite of the fact that Grandmaster Bolden and Master Pierre were instrumental in building a following for the late Professor Presas in the Mid-Hudson and NYC regions respectively. In fact it was Grandmaster Bolden who first brought the art and Professor to the eastern side of NYS and along the Hudson

River Valley between Albany and NYC in the mid 1980's. In the past the leaders of the MoTTs (Masters of Tapi-Tapi) and the WMAA (World Modern Arnis Alliance) were adamant that anyone not associated with their respective groups were not even considered as being Modern Arnis Players, unless those people joined MoTTs or WMAA and retested for the rank grades that were earned under Professor Presas. They were also quite critical of Master Vargas because he had not trained directly with the late Professor.

Recently several associates of the MoTTs were critical of me and the above statements that I posted on my blog. They insisted that I was mistaken and the “must test for rank” rule was not the policy of their current leaders. I am quite willing to concede that they might be correct with regard to the current leadership, however, they are flat-out wrong with regard to the policies of Dr. Randi Schea and Mr. Jeffery Delaney, the initial leaders of the MoTTs back in 2002. I communicated with both of those men and their attitude was exactly what I have posted here as well as on my blog. Those guys were not going to recognize and honor the rank certificates issued by the late Professor Remy Presas in the organization that they inherited from him. Mr. Tim Hartman had the same policy in 2002.

I should also point out the fact that these group leaders and number of their current associates were equally, if not more disdainful of Grandmaster Atillo. They refused to accept and understand the fact that Grandmaster Atillo was an original member of the “Balintawak Self Defense Club”

which was founded in 1953 in Cebu City, Philippines. That was the very first Balintawak Club, with all others being spin offs that were formed several years later after some disputes among the original founding members as well as their students. One of the ongoing disputes among the various Balintawak groups is over whether or not to teach the “grouping method” of Grandmaster Jose Villisan and Grandmaster Teofilo Velez. These men founded their own club in 1957 under the name of the Balintawak International Self-Defense Club. They were the first group to open their own official clubhouse away from the original Balintawak Street club site. Grandmaster Atillo remained a member of the BSDC until 1975 and he teaches the ungrouped or non-grouped method of Balintawak which he attributes to his teacher - his father, Grandmaster Vincente Atillo - who was one of the founders of the BSDC in 1953. Grandmaster Atillo maintains that he is teaching Saavedra Eskrima, the art that his father taught him and which his father learned as a classmate of Venacio Bacon, Delfin Lopez and Timeteo Maranga under the guidance of Great Grandmaster Lorenzo and Grandmaster Teodoro “Doring” Saavedra in the 1930s prior to WWII.

Grandmaster Atillo is among the last of the people who knew the Saavedra's, Lorenzo and Doring, personally. His art is the closest thing that we have to the original Saavedra Eskrima System, which is also known more popularly as “Balintawak Eskrima”. Couple that fact with the reality that Grandmaster Atillo assisted his father Vincente, who taught future Balintawak Grandmaster Arnulfo

## Some Thoughts on Successors & Disciples

### *Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo's List of Successors & Disciples - Personal Thoughts*

In July 9, 2013, Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo posted his list of the Official Master, Successor and Disciple, and Disciple of ABWAE, on his Face Book site and it was reprised on a number of other sites including my Southeastern Martial Arts Blog and the FMA Informative newspaper, “*Volume 12, Number 8 on page 17*”. Personally I was very happy to see that list posted and published by the Grandmaster in his own lifetime. So many Grandmasters have failed to name a successor and still others have resorted to using a last will and testament statement that was acknowledged after their passing.

What usually follows is an intra-system battle royal for the leadership role among the followers of that Grandmaster. The battle is nasty, ugly, protracted and creates large fissures within the organization as people take sides among those vying for the top spot. All sorts of allegations, rumors, false and hateful statements result. These fissures most often lead to major organizational splits and a number of splinter groups rise up from out of the ashes of discontent and consternation over the death of the Grandmaster.

Modern Arnis practitioners have gone through those experiences and didn't fare any better

than most other martial arts systems even though there was allegedly a will left in place by the late Professor Remy Presas. Hopefully we will not see a repeat of that debacle when Grandmaster Atillo passes away. He has published his list of Atillo World Balintawak Arnis-Eskrima Masters, Disciples and Successors-Disciples. This information was placed on a very conspicuous public venue in addition to being witnessed by 100 or so people the previous day at a weekend camp for devotees to the Atillo Balintawak System. The certificates awarded to the various people were signed by Grandmaster Atillo and counter-signed by Master Dan Inosanto. In the Filipino martial arts circles of North America it doesn't get any better than that in terms of credibility.

In his Face Book statement Grandmaster Atillo wrote “Please note, any names not listed below who have received Masters prior to this date are null and void - due to NOT having the complete system, inactivity, and/or questionable character.” Things cannot be made any clearer than that if someone had their doubts about who Grandmaster Atillo is going to support with regard to his Balintawak System. He also took the time to describe and define what he means by terms Master,

Disciple and Successor-Disciple.

I want to convey my congratulations to all of the people who were recognized by Grandmaster Atillo in each of the three categories. They have earned a significant honor and they deserve our admiration and respect for their achievements within the Filipino martial arts. I would also like to give a special recognition to three friends, Grandmaster Tom Bolden, Grandmaster Douglas Pierre and Master Peter Vargas. These gentlemen are the only people being recognized who as far as I know trained in Modern Arnis prior to training under Grandmaster Atillo. If there is another Modern Arnis practitioner on the list I am sorry that I do not know you and have not recognized you in this essay.

#### **The Successor-Disciple is defined in the Face Book Post as follows:**

Successor And Disciple: “... is chosen and awarded the honor of Successor and Disciple having acquired exceptional knowledge, skills and ability of an Eskrima practitioner through the personalized guidance and keen instructions of Great Grandmaster Atillo as governed by the standards of the Atillo Balintawak World Arnis-Eskrima Your responsibility is to continue learning, to represent, and to propagate the art of Atillo

Moncol, the art of Balintawak. It was Grandmaster Moncol, who served as Professor Remy Presas' first Balintawak instructor. Afterwards, the young Remy Presas was passed along to Grandmaster Timeteo Maranga for further training. The young Remy Presas was then passed on to Grandmaster Bacon for "finishing" as was the Balintawak tradition in the 1950's and 60's. The Balintawak training network couldn't be any tighter and it is very important because Balintawak forms one (1) component of the 5 arnis methods that comprise the base or foundational root of the Modern Arnis System under Professor Remy Presas. The other four component parts of Modern Arnis are the figure 8 striking system, the banda y banda striking system, the palis-palis method and crossada method. The latter two (2) methods are espada y daga (sword and dagger) style fighting arts and were taught to Professor Presas by his grandfather Leon B. Presas, beginning at the age of 6 years old.

Professor mentions this early training on video tape 6 of his original Modern Arnis training series in 1986. Additionally he mentions this connection to his grandfather in tape 2 of the Black Belt video series and in interviews published by Ed Shanley (Karate International, May/June 1989) and Rick Mitchell (Inside Kung Fu, December 1990). In his Practical Art of Eskrima book, Professor Presas refers to the espada y daga method as "The Spanish Techniques" and he relies entirely on the crossada defensive method with his stick in his right hand over his blade and covering his center line between his waist and shoulders.

The critical point here is that Professor Presas cites Moncol, Maranga and Bacon as his Balintawak instructors. The Atillos trained Moncol in Balintawak. Professor goes on to tell Rick Mitchell that Moncol "...trained me in a close-quarter style of Arnis called the Balintawak style. This guy had a great influence on my life." Professor trained with Moncol for 2 years. This is a very important fact to consider because one of the things that Professor Presas wrote about and demonstrated in his first two English language books Modern Arnis: *Philippine Stick Fighting* (1974) and *The Practical Art of Eskrima* (1976) published in the Philippines was the use of the brace block and stick checking. That stick blocking system is quintessential Atillo Balintawak - Saavedra Eskrima. When I first began training in Modern Arnis under Sifu Don Zanghi, in 1981 he taught brace blocking along with force against force and go with the force stick blocking styles. At my first seminars under Professor Presas in 1982 he reinforced Sifu Zanghi's stick blocking methods, particularly the brace blocks against strike 1 - 7 and 10 - 12. Ama Guro Billy Bryant wrote that "Many Arnisadors claim it (brace blocks) is an outdated method. In combat this may be true. However, in America where one seeks only to learn self-defense quickly, the brace block is an ideal method for beginning students; mainly because it's hard to get novices to understand the reverberation lines." He goes on to later state, "... teaching the brace block is ideal for senior citizens and women in the preliminary stages of their training. Once the student

learns to angle (the body and head), force to force and deflecting can be taught." (*Inside Karate, August 1992, page 30*).

Grandmaster Atillo teaches brace blocking and holds his stick in a vertical position in front of his center line. He then checks, parries or passes the opponent's stick as he makes his counter-strikes. It seems logical to me that we would find some vestiges of the Moncol and Atillo influences in Professor Presas' presentations. We can and should assume that over time and with more training and experiences some things would change because Professor Presas was a creative person.

Professor drifted away from brace blocking and relied more and more on force to force blocks and deflections so that by the late 1980s he had all but abandoned the brace blocking concepts. When one views Professor Presas doing his version of Balintawak tapi-tapi there are a great deal of similarities to Grandmaster Atillo's approach to stick locking and stick disarms. There is not enough of a difference between the two men to argue over, realistically. Of course some people will always find something to nit-pick.

It is quite significant that Grandmaster Tom Bolden, Grandmaster Douglas Pierre and Master Peter Vargas have been training with the man who indirectly helped Professor Presas to establish part of the foundation for Modern Arnis. They have had the opportunity to benefit from training with the man who helped train Professor's first Balintawak instructor. They have gained some valuable insights into the theories and concepts behind the Balintawak philosophy by working with an

instructor who has some 60+ years of Balintawak-Saavedra Eskrima experience to fall back on as he helps his students through his personal system. Try as they will, the Modern Arnis based detractors of Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo, Grandmaster Tom Bolden, Grandmaster Douglas Pierre and Master Peter Vargas have nothing better to offer anyone when it comes to understanding and utilizing Balintawak concepts or training options.

Most Modern Arnis practitioners received only a small portion of information from Professor Presas about the art of Balintawak. He revealed most of that information as tapi-tapi within the last 5 years of his teaching career in the USA and Canada. The irony of that situation is that Professor only began teaching tapi-tapi and sinawali boxing because he was "forced" into it by the arrival of Grandmaster Bobby Taboada in the USA in 1994. Grandmaster Taboada began teaching his Balintawak Cuentada style in seminars and camp settings. He was working counter to the prevailing Balintawak teaching method which was based solely on one to one instruction. Several of my Modern Arnis friends who had found Balintawak instructors in the USA were adamant that Grandmaster Taboada was wrong and watering down the art. Grandmaster Bolden and I didn't see it that way and eagerly worked with Grand-

master Taboada before we met Grandmaster Atillo, who also uses the seminar/camp method of instruction. We learned very quickly that our Modern Arnis backgrounds were perfect for adapting the Balintawak styles of both Grandmaster Taboada and Grandmaster Atillo. The major differences between the two men are that Grandmaster Taboada uses the grouping method of instruction and is a hard stylist in his approach to Balintawak. Grandmaster Atillo does not use the grouping method and has a softer, finesse approach which is quite deceptive because the power application is always a quarter beat or less away from being used.

The Modern Arnis people who disregard Grandmaster Atillo, Grandmaster Tom Bolden, Grandmaster Douglas Pierre and Master Peter Vargas are viewing the world through a foggy lens of past biases and a number of false certainties that come with having a limited knowledge of history; in this case the long term history of Balintawak, the long term history of Professor Remy Presas and his Modern Arnis roots in addition to the role of Lorenzo and Teodoro Saavedra in preparing the way for the stick fighting style that became known as Balintawak. Doesn't it

concern the detractors of Grandmaster Atillo that the Balintawak System was named after the street where the first club practiced? Where did this art come from, what are its component parts? After all is said and done, we know the component parts that contributed to Professor Presas' Modern Arnis and Balintawak is one of those pieces. But we can't do the same thing for Balintawak if we take away Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo and his approach from the Saavedra Eskrima perspective. I have already revised my Modern Arnis lineage chart and I have added Grandmaster Vincente Atillo and Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo as the Balintawak instructors of Grandmaster Arnulfo Moncol, who in turn instructed Grandmaster / Professor Remy A. Presas who was in turn one of my Modern Arnis instructors along with Sifu Don Zanghi.

I believe that it's a great honor to have been acknowledged and accepted by Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo as a highly skilled practitioner of the Atillo-Saavedra connection to Modern Arnis. I am extremely happy for Grandmaster Tom Bolden, Grandmaster Douglas Pierre and Master Peter Vargas. I wish each of them even greater success in the future.

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