

# **BALINTAWAK ESKRIMA**



# BALINTAWAK ESKRIMA

## Filipino Fighting Art



**Sam L. Buot, Sr.**

“It’s all in the left hand”



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# DEDICATION

## From the Eagles Nest

(Pugad Lawin)

This book is dedicated to the masters who shared their knowledge, unknowing of the significance of their contribution to the cultural heritage of a proud Filipino people. We all owe the art to the Great Grandmaster Venancio “Anciong” Bacon, whose genius and skills never saw much of the product of his work during his lifetime. Like many geniuses of their art – Mozart, Van Gogh and Beethoven – they died poor but their genius prevails and outlives their mortal bodies. Also deserving credit are my other teachers, Atty. Jose Villasin, my compadre and tutor, together with his partners, and Teofilo Velez, also a student of Anciong, a teacher, a foot soldier of Balintawak, ever faithful to its cause. Among my early tutors was my cousin Teddy Buot, heir apparent to Anciong until his departure for the US in 1974. To the intrepid Balintawak Warriors both living and dead, who from the eagles nest flew in quest of the “impossible dream,” and planting the seeds of Balintawak worldwide. Many students have missed their chance to bloom through early demise.

I also dedicate this book to longtime faithful students with special mention of Craig Roland Smith who has spent countless hours and fortune for the propagation of the art, taking all photographs and videos for this book and my current students Adam Tompkins, Bart Vermilya, Ryan Buot, Nick Thompson, Rob Casquejo, Thiel Ruperto, Leonard Meurer, Carlos Sevilla, Sal Banuelos, Audie and Gallant Betita and Danny Sevilla and other unnamed and unaccounted past students, friends and family who have placed faith in my passion; special mention goes to my stable-mate Bobby Taboada for his steadfast loyalty, *FMA Informative* publisher and editor

Steven Dowd for his support, loyalty and encouragement and to Tambuli Media publisher Dr. Mark V. Wiley, for his faith in the project. To Sal Banuelos, who has contributed greatly to this book, especially in the picture taking, Audie and Gallant Betita, for demonstrating some techniques. Finally, thanks to my son Ryan Benjamin Buot, who has been my sounding board for new ideas; my sparring partner, critic and innovator of new ideas.

This book would have never been finalized without the loving patience of an indulgent and loving wife, Menchie, who may have wondered about the time spent on this book and the free lessons given to pass on and preserve the art. I never viewed Eskrima as a source of livelihood and as a means of making money. The whole family may have also wondered whether this has been a childish pursuit of juvenile pleasure or whether this is true passion and devotion to an indigenous Filipino art.

Students of the art may not realize the value of its history, the accumulation and compilation of techniques from the masters even from other students over a lifetime of study and some innovations I have created and originated. I have paid a lot of money and time to learn them. One single technique will be well worth the price of this book, a price I would have eagerly paid to learn.

In closing here, I would like to share one of my favorite proverbs.

*He who knows not and knows not that he knows not: he is a fool—shun him.*

*He who knows not and knows that he knows not: he is simple—teach him.*

*He who knows and knows not he knows: he is asleep—wake him.*

*He who knows and knows that he knows: he is a wise leader—follow him.*

—Unknown



# TESTIMONIALS

Since there is paucity of serious reading materials on eskrima, this written work proved to be a good contribution not only to the Filipino martial arts but to other Filipino performing arts as well. This is also a noble attempt to help in the preservation of an indigenous knowledge that took generations of Filipino artists to develop. The author, Sam Buot, is not new to eskrima. For decades he immersed himself into eskrima and we are grateful now, that he is finally sharing his experience and codifying his profound thoughts on this matter. The author's insight on Balintawak Eskrima, the essence of this work, is hard to come by in this contemporary sports-oriented eskrima world. Eskrima as a whole, belongs to humanity and ought to be shared with many people and for many generations in the future to appreciate. It is aptly said, *verba volant scripta manent*—spoken words fly but written words stay. So having a book like this on eskrima is a great literary contribution indeed. What we are about to read is, of course, just a small but significant fragment of an intangible cultural heritage from this side of the vast Pacific. This work partly describes what we Filipinos are made of and what we can do. And since this is a cultural matter, we Filipinos are proud of this work.

—*Ned Ra. Nepangue, MD*  
Cebu City 30th July 2014

In knowing Sam Buot over the years I have found it a joy to watch him executing Balintawak Eskrima with smoothness and precision which leads to perfection. His abilities as a teacher are among the highest of qualities. Often we have talked about the history of Balintawak, wherein Sam draws from his own experiences. This book by Sam Buot which has been put together from personal experience and research is a book that even some Balintawak practitioners will have their jaws dropping, scratching their heads and thinking how come we did not know this. For anyone that gets this book it will be a book that is a treasure trove of knowledge and a book which will be considered one of the best if not the best book on Balintawak.

—*Steven K. Dowd*  
Arnis Balite, *FMA Informative*

I want to extend my greetings and good wishes to you, Sam Buot, as a part of the Balintawak Eskrimador family. Your skill descendants and followers will have utmost pride and respect in you, for they were taught not only your eskrima excellence but also the will to survive. As one of your colleagues in the social environment, I am proud knowing in person as my compadre and sparring partner during the early Balintawak years. You are one of the best eskrimadors I have ever crossed sticks with. On behalf of the Kritters Group Balintawak-Marapao Aggression System (KGB-MAGGS) I would like to express my gratitude to you as author of this book in keeping Balintawak on the forefront of eskrima. Daghang Salamat Pare Sam.

—*Dr. Ben Marapao*  
Cebu City, Philippines

**M**y sincere greetings to Sam Buot on his book on Balintawak Eskrima. It is great to see that he has researched the people and the history of an outstanding Filipino art developed by the late, and phenomenal Grandmaster Venancio “Anciong” Bacon. Having been a student in Michigan of the late Manong Ted Buot, who was G.M. Anciong’s dedicated student and instructor at the Balintawak Club in Cebu, I can clearly see the genius of how G.M. Anciong had developed the techniques of his art with extreme accuracy and timing. With Sam’s Balintawak background and first-hand experiences, his book will keep the legacy of the art alive and well-remembered.

—*David Hatch*

Attributive Martial Arts  
Canton, Michigan

**G**randmaster Sam Buot was introduced to me by my dad Atty. Jose Villasin as Sam Buot was a fellow attorney with the same interest in the Balintawak Arnis Eskrima. The year was 1978. I recall Sam Buot started his Balintawak lessons from my dad Atty. Jose Villasin. Since then I started hearing more about him. Sam Buot showed great interest and was very sharp in picking up his lessons so quickly. My dad introduced one lesson after another since Sam absorbed it so fast and understood his lessons quicker than his other students. He thought it may be because he is a lawyer or he is just gifted in understanding things.

Sam Buot has been very loyal to my dad and to the art of Balintawak. They met regularly at the club house, our home, Velez’ backyard, or at Atty. Buot’s home with GM Venancio Anciong Bacon and GM Teofilo Velez, Bobby Taboada, Nilo Servilla, Chito Velez, Ben Marapao, Nick Elizar, Nene Gaabucayan and the rest of the Balintawak International Club family of which my dad was the president. Atty. Buot was elected vice-president. Because of Sam Buot’s sincerity and loyalty, my dad did not withhold any secrets and techniques from the abecedario to the most polarizing training method he called “groupings” —a method and concept devised by my dad to internalize, visualize, memorize and master the reflexive moves and responses to any offensive strikes from any direction. This has been considered a high point in a student’s training. There were more offensive techniques which were never taught except to a few, and Atty. Buot was one of them.

Atty. Sam Buot has the proven integrity, training and experience. Furthermore, it has been the relationship between the GM Bacon, my dad, his teachers and that he showed his loyalty, confidence, sincerity and respect that I recognize and congratulate Atty. Sam Buot for his book. More power to you Grandmaster Sam Buot!!!

—*Ver Villasin*

May 30, 2014

I may be a bit partial with this book since the author is my uncle. Sam Buot has devoted a large portion of his life preserving, promoting and chronicling the history of Balintawak and the lessons he learned from my dad, Grandmaster Anciong Bacon and his other teachers. His journey has been one of growth, innovation and discovery without abandoning the true essence of the Anciong Bacon Balintawak legacy.

Because of his avid pursuit and passion in keeping the Balintawak legacy alive—the techniques, history, stories and anecdotes about this indigenous Filipino martial art will be preserved for posterity. Sam Buot first held the stick through dad and shared his first Balintawak moments in our backyard in Cebu. His lessons were far and few in between due to his studies at Silliman University. It was through dad that he was introduced to Mano' Anciong as an observer of the big boys. The old man was related to our family and he showed deference to both my grandfather and to Uncle Sam's father. Thus, Mano' Anciong also had a soft spot in his heart for my father Teodoro A. Buot. I know this book will be an excellent coffee table conversation piece and a source of information and history for Balintawak enthusiasts. I wish you well for this wonderful endeavor.

—*Melissa Buot-Favazza*

During my years as a student of the art of Balintawak, there were three instructors that aided in my development. The following were instrumental in helping shape my learning and progress in the art:

1) Atty. Jose Villasin awakened me to Balintawak in 1967; 2) Teofilo "Tatay" Velez educated me with a solid and full understanding of *Balintawak*. He also endorsed me to Manoy Anciong Bacon; 3) Manoy Anciong Bacon elevated my keen awareness of the nuances of the art. I will always remember his wise words: "Keep your composure," "Adapt and overcome the threat," "Sniff me out," "Move the body," and "Keep playing."

Today, as a member of the senior generation of the *Balintawak* Community, I would like to offer my congratulations to Grandmaster Sam Buot for the completion of his book, and wish him the best of luck in spreading and disseminating this knowledge.

With Humility,  
—*Sir Bob Silver C. Tabimina*



# FOREWORD

Grandmaster Sam Buot is a true student of Balintawak Eskrima. He is one of the few survivors of the original students of the late Great Grandmaster Anciong Bacon who died in 1980. His techniques and knowledge are direct from the masters. If there is anyone who can teach them to the world, it is Atty. Sam Buot.



I have known Atty. Sam Buot for the last thirty some years. He is a lawyer by profession and a very successful real estate businessman in the Philippines. On top of that he is a fellow Cebuano whom I met while he was under the private tutelage of Great Grandmaster Venancio “Anciong” Bacon, Grandmaster Jose Villasin, and my beloved mentor, Grandmaster Teofilo Velez. Sam was totally immersed in studying and experiencing the unique and original Balintawak moves and techniques by these Grandmasters, known to all Balintawak students in the “70s” as “The Team”. I was then an instructor and I always looked forward to be assigned to train with Sam, a man of affluence, for the selfish reason that I could also eat the food and drink imported liquor that the Grandmasters were enjoying.

GM Buot has been very helpful in building up the names of the masters of Balintawak and his fellow *eskrimadores*, highlighting their achievements. It was GM Buot who helped me settle in Phoenix, Arizona when I first came to the U.S. from New Zealand and Australia before finally moving to North Carolina.

Now in his late seventies, he wants to leave a legacy behind for future eskrimadors. Congratulations to Atty. Buot for his book. It will be a handbook for eskrimadors worldwide.

Grandmaster Bobby Taboada

# FOREWORD

How does an eskrimador insure his legacy? Some form large organizations and teach seminars the world over. Others put their personal history and their art down in writing. Sam Buot, the author of this book, did just that—and there was so much to share, it took him 20 years from start to finish! The book you now possess is the work of decades of preparation. Little by little Manong Sam wrote down his stories, remembrances and the nuances of every technique he could recall. I received a copy of his then 400+ page PDF and contacted him immediately to turn it into a book. And what a task it was! I mean how do you reduce 400 pages of text into 300 pages of text and images? With nimble editing and clear vision. Many sleepless nights, weeks even, tuned into nine months of reorganization, a dozen photo shoots, editing and reediting and refining. At 78 Manong Sam showed how tireless a warrior he is, putting many younger writers I have worked with to shame. And we are grateful for his effort. After all, Manong Sam is the eldest living disciple of the late Anciong Bacon, the grandmaster and founder of Balintawak Eskrima.

In this dense volume, Sam Buot takes the reader on a deep journey into the belly of Balintawak Eskrima, laying the foundation with a look at Philippine martial history before jumping right into the formation of the Balintawak style in the 1950s. That was an important yet volatile time in Eskrima history, especially in Cebu, where entrenched eskrimador clans like the Saavedra, Romo, Ilustrisimo, and Canete families tried to stake their claim of prominence. One name rose from these times, and that is Anciong Bacon and his Balintawak Eskrima, an art that has had many fabled masters, including Bacon himself, as well as his top disciples Jose Villasin, Teofilo Velez, Ted Buot, Delfin Lopez, Bobby Taboada and Sam Buot, among others.

After enticing the reader with an intimate discussion of the history of eskrima and Balintawak's place in it, Buot tells the stories of the great masters of the art. He was a participant observer and is uniquely qualified to set the true history. His narrative style is compelling and makes the reader feel like they are by his side hearing tales of old first hand. We feel like we are in the old clubs, watching the masters perfect their skills. Their poverty and dangerous living quarters bringing us chills and a close look at the many rare historical images reveals the conditions. We are then treated in several chapters to Manong Sam's eskrima secrets: the principles and strategies he has developed and perfected over a half-century in this dynamic art.

While no book can hope to be “complete,” this book by Sam Buot is comprehensive and does more than any other to establish the legacy of Grandmaster Anciong Bacon, Balintawak Eskrima and the book's author, himself. I am proud to have worked on this project with Manong Sam and I am honored to call him my friend.



—Dr. Mark Wiley  
Publisher, Tambuli Media  
February 09, 2015

# INTRODUCTION

The art of Eskrima stick fighting is indigenous to the Philippines, developed and practiced for centuries. Until the 1980s, however, the art was hardly known outside the Philippines. In a polyglot archipelago like the Philippines, eskrima was also known as pagkalikali, panandata, didya, kabaroan, kaliradman, sinawali and arnis or arnis de mano in Luzon. It was also known as eskrima, olisi, garote or baston in the Visayas. In Mindanao, it has been known as kalirongan, kuntao or silat. In the Pre-Spanish Philippines it was also called gilás. The term kali, while quite popular in the United States and Europe, was a term unheard of by me as a student of the art the past half a century.

The Philippines has 87 languages and dialects, 16 of which are major languages. Words and terms vary from province to province. This is explained by the fact that there are 7,107 islands spread over the archipelago further broken up by the mountains and natural boundaries. Centuries back, tribes and kingdoms, sometimes warring, isolated them further from each other. There was no national identity until the islands were consolidated by the Spanish invaders. Thus, development of a national language did not happen until the last century. I prefer and use the Cebuano terms for forms and techniques in the art of Eskrima, as this is the language in which I learned the art in Cebu.

In my personal research of the etymology of the word in the 1980s, I have concluded that Cebuanos may have borrowed the word eskrima from the French word *escrime*, meaning fencing and from the Spanish word *esgrima*, meaning swordplay or fencing. The etymology of the word may be by an attempt of 17th and 18th century Filipinos to sound sophisticated by borrowing words from the colonizing European (Spanish) invaders. It was also possible that the Spaniards gave it its name or *escrime* or *eskruna* by the French for fencing. Regardless, the word eskrima is the accepted generic Visayan word for Filipino martial art. It has now been adapted worldwide as the origin of the word. Eskrima now is synonymous with the terms arnis and kali; arnis is more predominantly used in other areas in Luzon and kali is more predominantly used in the USA than in the Philippines. I have heard of some strained explanation of the etymology of the word kali, which I am ignoring.

Eskrima is a complete martial arts system. It is not only stick fighting for which the art is known and famous for but does in fact include other weapons fighting, most especially knife fighting and defense and bare hand combat emanating from the fist and hand fighting methods called panuntukan, suntukan, buntalan or banatan, sumbagay and bunutan. There is also the grappling systems known as bugno', dumog or layug. Basically, it is pure self-defense and, until recently, it was never considered a sport. There are no limits to the target area or the seriousness of the injury inflicted. There is no concept of foul blows. In fact, in Balintawak Eskrima—the subject of this book—foul blows are mastered into a science.

The birth of Eskrima is indeed humble. In the early years of self-defense clubs in Cebu, the members were usually specialist in their own respective fighting arts. Some were boxers, others were wrestlers and some were knife fighters or weapons specialists. At that time in the history of the art, eskrima was practiced by law enforcement officers, labor union leaders and enforcers, thugs, hooligans, criminal elements and the “Great Unwashed,” the proletariat and in Filipino, we called them the *bakya* crowd. I remember seeing a peddler wearing a *salakot* (farmer’s head gear). Jimboy called him his *salakot* student Ramon, and a baker also named Ramon. No last names to remember. He also had a *bibinka* (rice cake) maker named Istan, none exactly belonging to the elite of society. Many of them were known only by their first names.

These were the poor people who wore wooden clogs and pushed carts to markets. The original members of the self-defense clubs were not exactly members of the social elite or of polite society. As a young lawyer, I admit, I was embarrassed to be associated with the group. We practiced in secrecy and for the most part, it was not something we bragged or talked about. It was something I learned and practiced mostly for survival in a violent society, disarmed by the dictator Marcos. That is all hindsight. As a nationalist, however, I also found the art to be native and indigenous to the Philippines. It was something Filipinos could call their own; thus my keen interest in the art. Besides, during Martial Law in the Philippines, when owning a gun was punishable by death, eskrima became the better option for self-preservation.

Although rattan is the common training weapon in use today, sometimes Philippine hardwood known as kamagong is used. It is a heavy, hard and sturdy weapon. Sometimes bahi was more commonly used. Bahi is taken from the buri tree, a palm tree with the outer trunk of which is very hard, dense and fibrous. This is a favorite of Philippine martial artists and fighters since it is more abundant and cheaper. The hardest wood in the Philippines is called the mangkono or the Philippine ironwood. Although this is the hardest wood in the Philippines, I have not heard of it used as an eskrima weapon, probably because it is very rare and expensive. It is most probably an endangered species. This is usually used as a substitute for *lignum vitae*, claimed to be the hardest wood in the world found in the Bahamas. Takesha Okuma at Camp Courtney Okinawa claims that the hardest wood in the world is *tiga* found in Sibuyan Islands, Philippines.

The bladed weapons in the Philippines include the sundang, baraw, pinuti, bangkaw, baraw, karambit, lagaraw, sundang, palamenko, daga, kris, laring, kalis, barong, gunong, golok, kampilan, gayang, pita, punyal, itak, banjal, bangkon, bankaw, lahot and panabas. The tameng was the term they used for the shield. Of course, the Batanguenos are world famous for their fan knife or balisong, which is an entire fighting art in itself.

The bladed weapon is very common on Philippines streets. It is the cheapest form of deadly weaponry with the dearth and scarcity of guns. Knife fighting or more accurately knife assassinations are the more common way of avenging a grudge, settling a dispute and of attacking or killing a foe. Thus, the art of knife fighting and defense is intrinsic and core in the Filipino culture. In rural Philippines, the ubiquitous bolo or machete was the farmer’s choice. It was a utility blade used for chopping wood, cutting grass, coconuts or used as a weapon in



the event of confrontations or settling of disputes. Usually, a family had a special self-defense bolo which was slimmer and longer called the pinuti. This emanates from the root word puti, and pinuti means, *made white*. Since the weapon was so shiny and clean, thus, the evolution of the name.

The balisong or fan knife is known worldwide is made in the province of Batangas and it is also known as the Batangas knife. Those sold worldwide or made elsewhere have locks on the wrong side of the flip-cover. This was probably deliberately done to confuse the unknowing user, thus keeping its secret use and methods to themselves. There would never be mastery of its use with the flip-lock on the wrong side of the blade. Needless to say, blades, bolos and knives were also used in crimes of robbery and murder.

In Cebu, where I came from, the entire districts of Basak and Mambaling were lined with blacksmiths and blade smiths that forged and created fancy fighting knives as well as the commercially used bolos or sundang and the fancier pinuti. What we call knife fights are more of assassinations, since the attack was usually in response to an affront, conflict or wrong that many poor and down trodden people resort to rather than drag and settle in court that was expensive, unjust and frustrating, usually tilted and favoring the rich and powerful. The oppressed poor mock the justice system, ridicule the courts and scoff at death. They settle their wrongs their own way, usually with the cheapest form, knives; thus, the culture of knife fighting or knife assassinations.

Eskrima and Arnis especially involve the use of weapons. Yet, despite common perception, Filipino fighting arts on the whole include bare hand combat strikes on hitting points with the use of hands, feet, knees, elbows, head butts, biting and further includes grappling, joint manipulation, holds and controls on pressure points for submission holds (*pamislit*). There are no holds barred, no limits on where and what to hit except in friendly workouts where injury to a workout partner is always avoided. You will quickly run out of sparring partners and friends.

Eskrima is an ancient fighting art, a product of a different culture and generation when guns and machine guns were rarely in use. With the coming of the cannon and gun power to the Philippines, Lapu-lapu and his brave warriors fell to the better armed Spaniards. The stick is anachronistic, archaic and obsolete as a weapon of modern warfare. Thus today, the art should be thought as a study of cultural tradition, both as a means of self-discipline, a means of exercise and as a means of fellowship with fellow eskrima enthusiasts. Through the art, we develop strength, balance, speed, reflex movement, grace and self-confidence but not as a fool hardy and stupid tool for aggression. This book is limited to the stick fighting aspect of the Filipino fighting arts. It is my area of expertise.

To appreciate Anciong Bacon's Balintawak Eskrima, you have to understand set-ups, anticipation, the art of outwitting through ruses and lures; economy and simplification of motion, sans lavish and squandered movements; effective strikes fused and bonded with speed,

power, elegance and grace. That is the essence of Anciong's Balintawak and Anciong Bacon is the founder of this dynamic style.

The range of movements in eskrima in general conform to the natural movements of the human body. There are no extreme contortions, distortion, warping, deformation or abnormal twists of the human body to place extreme stress and trauma on ligaments, muscle and bone structure. The 12 strikes are normal movements that can be translated to other offensive moves in other martial arts. The stances are normal athletic stances, the steps are normal walking steps and the movements are typical and consistent with everyday human motions. With normal care and proper warm up exercises, the art can be practiced from a very young age to a very advanced age. As of this writing, I am 78 and one of my students is also in his early 70s and we still can do normal moves any young person can do. With experience and knowledge, we can pretty much spar with a young person, especially with a stick. Although eskrima is a complete martial art that includes weapons, bare hand combat and grappling, it does not claim the same intensity as mixed martial art combat used at the MMA tournaments. Although the real life battles are in fact worse—we master all foul blows and strikes, which includes, biting, eye gouging, knee and elbow breaks, grabbing or hitting the groin, submission holds, chokes and strikes to all knockout and hitting points and disabling strikes on vital parts using, fist, elbow, knee, head as well as knowledge and mastery of pressure points.



This book is written largely from personal experience and personal knowledge, as well as from oral history as told by the masters to the author and from other historical data elsewhere. I have set out to present the art from origin to modern times, as a fighting art, as cultural tradition and as a means of personal development. I hope you find it interesting, insightful and informative and that it inspires you to pursue Filipino martial arts in general, and Balintawak Eskrima in particular.

—Guro' Sam L. Buot, Sr.  
Student, Teacher, Chronicler and  
Balintawak Eskrima Historian and  
Keeper of the Flame

PART 1

HISTORY AND MASTERS OF  
BALINTAWAK





# CHAPTER I

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF ESKRIMA



*Map of Cebu from Google*

Pre-historical speculation is that the early Filipino martial arts came with the wave of immigration of people of Malaysia and Indonesia bringing their own bladed weapons, probably in 200 BC. It is believed that later part in Philippine history some of those weapons may have come with Arab influences that also brought with them their religion in Southern Philippines in Sulu and Mindanao.

### Discovery of the Philippines

In 1519 Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese unable to convince the King of Portugal, went and convinced King Charles V of Spain that if he sailed west, he could reach the Moluccas Islands, known for its spice, which would belong to Spanish Rule according to demarcations set in the Treaty of Tordesillas. On September 10, 1519, Ferdinand Magellan

sailed southward across the Atlantic Ocean at the southern tip of America, now known as the Strait of Magellan, towards the Pacific Ocean. He had five ships – flagship *Trinidad* (110 tons, crew of 55 men) under Magellan’s command, *San Antonio* (120 tons, crew of 60) commanded by Juan de Cartagena; *Concepcion*, (90 tons, crew of 45) commanded by Gaspar de Quesada; *Santiago* (75 tons, crew of 32) commanded by Juan Serrano and *Victoria* (85 tons, with a crew of 43, commanded by Luis Mendoza. The crew of 270 men included men from different nations including Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Greece, England and France. Antonio Pigafetta, a Venetian scholar, was appointed as chronicler to keep an accurate journal of Magellan’s voyage—the first circumnavigation of the globe.

On March 6, 1521, they reached the Marianas Islands and Guam. Since the ships were robbed by the natives, he called the three islands *Ladroni Island* (Island of Thieves). On March 17, 1521, Magellan sighted the Island of Samar, marking their arrival in the Philippine Archipelago. On April 28th Ferdinand Magellan waded on the shores of Mactan and was met by Rajah Lapu-lapu and his men.

When Spain colonized the Philippines, eskrima was already the standard fighting art of the archipelago. Many authors and teachers institute fantastic stories of a “mother art” called “kali” in the Philippines that in reality was never found. They say Rajah Lapu-lapu, ruler of Mactan, was, according to Pigafetta, a kali expert. Well, the fact is, nowhere in Pigafetta’s account is the word “kali” found. While we can only assume that since today the word Eskrima is prevalent

in Cebu and Mactan, that that is the name of the art being practiced at that time. But what it really was, we do not know for sure. We only have a battle account and legend to inform us. In his book, *Filipino Martial Culture*, Mark V. Wiley quotes from Pigafetta's actual records, as follows:

*“Our large pieces of artillery which were in the ships could not help us, because they were firing at too long a range, so that we continued to retreat for more than a good crossbow flight from the shore, still fighting, and in water up to our knees. And they followed us, hurling poisoned arrows four and six times; while, recognizing the captain, they turned toward him inasmuch as twice they hurled arrows very close to his head. But as a good captain and a knight he still stood fast with some others, fighting thus for more than an hour. And as he refused to retire further, an Indian threw a bamboo lance in his face, and the captain immediately killed him with his lance, leaving it in his body. Then, trying to lay his weapon on his sword, he could draw it out by halfway, because of a wound from a bamboo lance that he had in his arm. Which seeing, all those people threw themselves on him, and one of them with a large javelin thrust it into his leg, whereby he fell face downward. On this all at once rushed upon him with lances of iron and bamboo and with these javelins, so that they slew our mirror, our light, our comfort, and our true guide.”*

This was the first recorded Filipino repulse of foreign invaders. When the Spaniards returned to overcome the Filipinos with their superior firepower and technology, sticks and blades lost. Eskrima became a prohibited art in 1596 and again in 1764. It was totally banned by Don Simon Aredo y Salazar since it was discovered that masters of the art led revolting Filipinos. It was also said that Filipinos were abandoning their farms to practice eskrima. Besides, the practice often led to injury and death. The art went underground and was taught by Filipinos—often from father to son.

It is believed that Eskrima crept into religious ceremonial dances (*sinawali*) and in Moro-Moro plays, depicting the conflict between Christians and pagans usually referring to the Muslims or Moros. It is said that *sinawali* dances concealed moves of offense and defense so that moves could not be forgotten. The Filipino national hero Jose Rizal, and other martyrs and patriots such as General Gregorio Del Pilar, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, Andres Bonifacio, Fr. Gregorio Aglipay, and Antonio Luna were practitioners of the art. Poet Laureate Francisco Baltazar (also known as Balagtas) made mention of Buno and Arnis in his immortal romance “*Florante at Laura*.” The relevant part of the epic is also quoted in *Filipino Martial Culture*: “*Larong buno’t arnes na kinakitaan ng kanikaniyang liksi’t karunungan*” (The arts of Buno and Arnis displayed each one’s skill and knowledge). Again, while some have re-written history to include the word *kali* in the work of Balagtas, we know it is not a fact.

It is said that eskrima was very popular with the Filipino Maharlika or royal blood. Although, it may have roots from other cultures, modern eskrima is Filipino, after WWII much of it truly Cebuano with other styles and versions from other provinces catching up to the trend. Post WWII, Cebu has been the epicenter of the eskrima cultural revolution. The common folk also practiced eskrima/arnis. In olden times, it was a game, sport, physical exercise and

an art of self-defense. It probably started when early Filipinos discovered rattan (a long, tough vine, cut into convenient lengths), could be used as a good striking weapon.

Aside from sticks, bows and arrows, the early Filipinos were experts in bladed weapons. The bolo, pinute, kampilan or kris was a sidearm as the gun was to the West. This was especially true in Southern Philippines, which has influence from Indonesia, India, Thailand and Malaysia and more remotely from the Middle East from Muslim traders. The Muslims in Southern Philippines have a remarkable history of victories against foreign invaders, including the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese. General John “Black Jack” Pershing’s was still a captain when he was assigned in Mindanao to quell the Moro rebellion. The Moros were and are fierce warriors and the .45 caliber pistol was designed by Colt to stop the ferocious *juramentados*. The Muslim *juramentados* were suicide warriors and were unstoppable with lesser caliber weapons. Mindanao is rich in the variety of weaponry, since Muslim Philippines or Moroland used the bladed weapon as their deterrent against foreign invaders, not the least of which were the Spaniards, the Americans, the Japanese, their tribal enemies and lately the Philippine Army.



Weapons of Philippines

### The Birth of Balintawak and The Eagle’s Nest

The founder of Balintawak Eskrima, Venancio “Anciong” Bacon studied under the original known source of the Cebu eskrima knowledge, Lorenzo “Tatay Ensong” Saavedra, probably in the late 1930s in a style called Corto Linear. (Tatay is a term of endearment for father as in the American term “pops” or “dad”). Tatay Ensong organized what was then known as the Labangon Fencing Club. He taught his talented nephew, Doring Saavedra, Momoy Cañete, and the especially talented Anciong Bacon. They were later joined by other Cañete brothers. Bacon and Doring were Tatay Ensong’s most exceptional students. During the Second World War, Doring died at the hands of the Japanese *kempetai*. In 1952 the club was numerically dominated by the Cañete brothers. Bacon was frustrated with internal club struggles and politics and his further claim that the Doce Pares style was ineffective and seceded together with some of the better players of the club—among them labor leader



Anciong Bacon and Teofilo Velez



*The King Eagle Anciong Bacon*

Delfin Lopez and police officer Temoteo Maranga, and later joined by many more top fighters of the Doce Pares Club.

Anciong set up his clubhouse in 1952 in an obscure and modest downtown side street in Cebu City, named Balintawak Street. It was at the back of a small watch repair shop owned by Eduardo Baculi, a student of Anciong. This was located in the heart of downtown Cebu City, near the Corners of Colon and Balintawak Street. Balintawak is named after a historical place called Balintawak in Caloocan, Rizal, where the patriot Andres Bonifacio made his famous cry for an armed struggle in revolt against Spain. This was later known as *Sigaw ng Pugadlawin* or “The Cry from the Eagles Nest” that eventually evolved into “The Cry of Balintawak.” Historians say this event happened on August 19, 1896 and others say it occurred on August 23, 1896 and others say it happened on August 26, 1896. It seems that the official version is August 23rd, 1896 as declared by President Diosdado Macapagal. Regardless, it was Andres Bonifacio’s Katipunero cry against the Spanish Guardia Civil in revolt against and displayed by the tearing of the cedulas. This was considered the start of the Philippine Revolution.

Thus, *Pugad Lawin* is symbolic of Balintawak and the Philippine Eagle. It is a metaphor of strength, independence, grace, beauty and majesty. The Philippine Eagle is the biggest, strongest, tallest and one of the most magnificent birds in the world. It is the largest extant eagle species with an average size of 91 centimeters long and 6.5 kilograms in weight and a two meter or 6.56 feet wingspan up to eight feet long. It is also known as the “monkey eating eagle” or *ibon’g hari* or king bird. It feeds on monkeys, small deer, pigs, dogs, pythons, chickens and even on other eagles in the air. It is only found in the Philippines and is an endangered species with only about 150 to 500 individual birds surviving. It is the national bird of the Philippines. The



eagle's nest represents the lair from which Balintawak eskrimadors have left to roam, in fearless venture and to conquer the world. Anciong is our King Eagle.

## The Golden Years of Eskrima

During the early 1950s with the emergence of Anciong Bacon and his Balintawak Eskrima, the art attained new heights. It is said that the Golden Years of Eskrima were in the 60s to the 70s heightened by the rivalry between Doce Pares and Balintawak. Even in Cebu, there were very few that identified themselves as eskrimadors. Filipinos were ashamed of their own art and never embraced it openly. Many Filipinos are colonial minded. They readily accept anything imported and were never proud of their own indigenous art. If you see pictures of even Doce Pares, they wore judo uniforms (*gi*) for workouts. Their exhibitions were



*Balintawak and Doce Pares meeting with Johnny Chiuten, Momoy Cañete and Jose Villasin (seated), Teofilo Velez (squatting on the right), with Ben Marapao, Eddie dela Cruz, Max Tian and Bobby Taboada (standing).*

mainly judo and jiu-jitsu exhibitions. Only in the last 30 years has eskrima caught the attention of world martial artists. There was a dearth of information about experts in the art. Since the 1980s eskrimadors have come out of the woodwork and inserted themselves in the limelight. By the turn of the 20th century “grandmasters” sprouted all over the globe asserting themselves as original experts in the art. Since the 1980s, eskrima has nosed its way to gain world attention and even some prominence. Early Balintawak eskrimadors were versed mostly in the Asian arts. Johnny Chiuten, Ben Marapao, the dela Rosa brothers Winnie and Romy, and Joe Go with his Tat Kun To school presumably taught karate, kung-fu and tai chi. All were convinced to learn Balintawak after trying and testing Anciong's legendary skills.

## Eskrima Today

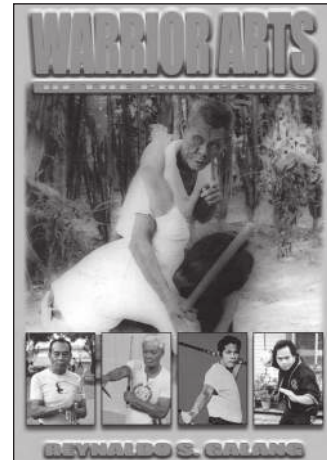
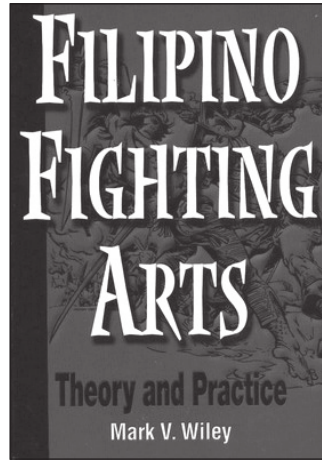
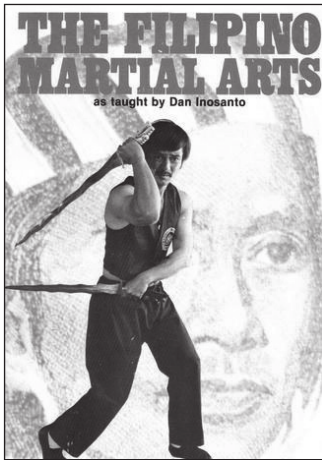
It was through the openness, sincerity and vision of Atty. Dionisio “Diony” Cañete that the Balintawak and the Doce Pares factions and other Cebu groups of eskrima started getting together and uniting eskrima as a Filipino fighting art. Cañete brought Cebu eskrima to national attention through Defense Secretary Gen. Fabian Ver. In 1975, Diony initiated the Cebu Eskrima Federation with meetings largely between the main rivals, the Doce Pares and the Balintawak Group and other smaller eskrima groups in Cebu including Larry Alcuizar's DIUREX, and Felimon Caburnay's La Punti Arnis de Abaniko. In those organizational meetings, Bacon, Villasin, Velez, Buot, Chiuten and Taboada represented the Balintawak groups. From the Cebu Eskrima Federation was born the NARAPHIL or the National Arnis Association of the Philippines, all through the initiative of Diony Cañete. Regardless, we



*Sam Buot, Nick Elizar, Diony Cañete and Ike Sepulveda*

cannot take away from the fact that GM Diony Cañete deserves the credit for bringing eskrima to national and international attention. In my visit to Cañete's studio in Cebu in September of 2013, Diony was very gracious and amiable. I give credit to Diony, Bobby Taboada and Nick Elizar for promoting amity, harmony and goodwill among eskrimadors worldwide, and now I am chiming in.

At the turn of the century, early eskrimadors came to the United States to work as migrant farmers, some coming via Hawaii to Mainland, mostly in California, bringing with them their native fighting arts which they even called *estocada*, again borrowed from the Spanish word meaning thrust as in the final thrust in killing of the bull. Many of these farmers were from Cebu, Panay, Samar, Batangas and the Ilocos region in Luzon and from Mindanao. There is little to no recorded history of the art. Most stories are circulated through tradition, legend and folklore. Many are apocryphal tales of their masters with healing and mystical powers, using *hilot* (massage) and *anting-anting* (amulets), which sounds too hokey and just hogwash for modern day practitioners. Some have pictures in Moro costume with bandanas and a kris for optics, to capitalize on the feared Muslim reputation. But the fact is, modern day eskrimadors wear baseball caps, tennis shoes and Nike workout pants, jeans or cut-off shorts, T-shirts and



probably karate gear at the dojo—gear which is not even Filipino. When we trained in Cebu, we wore street clothes to prepare for street confrontation with leather shoes to boot. I do train in normal workout gear, especially in the blistering heat of Phoenix.

Today, eskrima is a worldwide phenomenon. It has grown and propagated like wildfire, in the USA, Europe and Asia. The players are strong multi-faceted, equipped and train seriously like Olympic athletes. During olden times, poor fighters in the Philippines were tough and rag-tag fighter but mostly malnourished, ill-equipped and badly inadequate, deficient of any public or moral support. Polite society scoffed at them as bums, thugs, roughnecks or even criminally minded characters. It was not considered a sport or a thing of skill and pride with a drive for perfection. That is untrue in the world today, especially in the USA and now in Europe. Some of these new breed still need the technical skill and the deeper secrets of the art. Mostly from deep secrecy that have died with the masters. The seed has been planted and it is growing, developing and improving and with the seed of thought that is indigenous to the Philippines. One of the big promoters of Eskrima in the United States was Dan Inosanto, whose book, *The Filipino Martial Arts*, gave many in the Western world their first glimpse into these vast arts.

In the last 20 years, much of the grand exposure of the Filipino martial arts has come through the work of Dr. Mark Wiley. He was the first person to travel the islands and collect photos and interviews and video footage of the masters of all different styles. He documented this research in dozens of



Dr. Mark Wiley

magazine articles and no less than a dozen books. He was never concerned with promoting himself, but with finding the true history, spirit, culture and masters of the Filipino arts and documenting them all for posterity. His books *Filipino Martial Culture*, *Filipino Fighting Arts*, *Arnis Reflections* and *Mastering Eskrima Disarms* (to name a few) have become classics in the field, offering insights into the history, culture, myths, masters and systems of over 70 different styles of eskrima and arnis. To my knowledge, his work was the first to state plainly that the so-called myth of the never-found “kali the mother art,” was just that: a myth perpetuated by certain groups who used to call their arts arnis or eskrima. He received much backlash from those camps, especially in the USA, which is the only place the term was used at that time. But the older masters in the Philippines appreciated his work and respect him much. Without Dr. Wiley’s efforts many of the older masters, now deceased, and their arts would remain unknown to the world. I am equally honored that he is the editor and publisher of this book, my life’s work. Rey Galang should also be commended for his efforts to promote the Filipino arts, especially through his book, *Warrior Arts of the Philippines*, which features a photograph of Anciong Bacon on its cover.

Like many ideas that come to America, Americans make things better—sipa (known as “hacky sack”) and the yoyo originated from the Philippines. It has been developed and improved beyond the imagination of their originators. The balisong and knife fighting, also an integral part of Filipino culture is a big thing among trained knife fighters. There are Filipino trained knife and stick fighters that have infiltrated martial arts studios and Hollywood. Hollywood has picked up Eskrima starting with American born Filipino martial artist extraordinaire, Dan Inosanto, with Bruce Lee in the movies “Enter the Dragon” and “Game of Death.” More recently, “The Borne Identity” Series using dirty Filipino fighting techniques with Filipino fight coordinators, students of Dan Inosanto; also Dave Batista and Marrese Crump in “Wrong Side of Town” with eskrima fight sense, Denzel Washington in “The Book of Eli,” James Bond of “Quantum of Solace,” Tommy Lee Jones in “The Hunted” and “Death Drip” using the balisong and the “baddest” knife and fight scenes.

Pizza that came from Italy it is so much improved in the United States. I have tasted pizza in Italy and it is not anywhere near a Chicago style pizza and many Mom and Pop pizza parlors throughout the US. Even karate, kung-fu and tae kwon do from Asia are so developed in the US that natives of those native countries can no longer compete with Americans in those sports. The same is happening with eskrima. We have eagles that bred



*Jose Villasin, Johnny Chiuten, Anciong Bacon and Teofilo Velez*



VILLASIN-VELEZ BALINTAWAK WARRIORS L. to R. Fred Buot Jr., CNR, CNR, CNR, Tinong Ybanez (D), Nick Elizar, Ben Marapao, Winnie de la Rosa, Pilo Velez (D), Bobby Taboada, Johnny Chiuten (D), Bobby Tabimina, Jose Villasin (D), Hector Rizon (D), Sam Buot, Romeo de la Rosa (D), Nilo Servila (D), Chito Velez - Circa 1977 (CNR – Cannot remember, D - diseased) (Photo taken by Johnny Chiuten at Talisay)

in those humble nests and I was there where they bred. I have seen their lair and now they have spread their wings worldwide.

### **Fabled Masters and Challenges**

The first Balintawak explorers were Teddy Buot, Remy Presas (student of Toto Moncal), Bobby Taboada, Nick Elizar and his sons, Monie Velez and this humble author (Sam Buot), who have taught starting in backyards, then in karate dojos and in complex training camps. Martial artists from the USA, Australia and Europe have imported our Filipino fighters to train them. So do not be ashamed of modest beginning and seemingly wild and improbable ideas. Now eskrimadors have come out of the woodwork with a plethora of self-anointed black belts and claims of being first. Of course there were Filipino migrant workers at the turn of the century that brought their crude native fighting art but they never brought the art to the forefront of public recognition. They were father to son traditions chockfull of superstition and anting-anting's which could never find currency in the real world of rough and tough fighters.

Youth and little knowledge are dangerous. Little knowledge is often taken as a license to abuse and misuse strength. Age, maturity and experience are often a cure for the “green belt” mentality. Aggressiveness and hostility often lead to undesired physical and legal consequences and may even lead to death. When I was young, I used to be gung-ho about the art and was eager to use my little knowledge in picking up confrontation. Age, experience and maturity tell me that knowledge of any self-defense is better if quietly and humbly possessed with coolness, composure and humility, not with arrogance and swagger. Once young, strong and quick, the best martial artists grow old too and develop arthritis and joint injury and pains. That is, if they are lucky enough to grow old, they will be a pathetic image of their former selves. They become mostly fat, gray, ashen, wrinkled, shriveled and sluggish—probably with shortness of

breath and great joint pains. Also, I have seen the best martial artists and eskrimadors fall prey to untrained assassins.

Delfin Lopez, a Balintawak original, was a big, strong and brutal eskrimador. As president of the Allied Labor Union, he tried to pacify a strike at a rice warehouse. Unbeknownst to him a small, scrawny laborer assassin climbed on top of sacks of rice and jumped on him from behind, stabbing him above the clavicle with the knife going straight into his heart. He died on the spot with his mouth foaming and gurgling blood.

Eddie de la Cruz was a body builder, a nice fellow, Golden Gloves trainer and Balintawak eskrimador. Because he could not be confronted head-on, he was ambushed and killed. When you are known to be a martial artist, people in the Philippines do not confront you face-to-face. If they mean to kill, they will do so in an ambush. If you swagger, young guns will be eager to try you.

We have an eskrimador who is small and frail but possesses a frightful Charles Manson personality. He has killed three persons—one for what he thought was a lascivious look at his wife. Life in the old country was cheap and a person could literally get away with murder or be a victim of an assassination. Anciong Bacon himself killed a person in self-defense and was released from prison after a few years. We do not glorify his killing although it was done in self-defense. He was ambushed in the dark coconut groves of Labangon for the wrongdoings of his son.

## **The Truth of Bahad Challenge Matches**

Many yarns and apocryphal stories about alleged grandmasters that have been in hundreds of death matches are purely myth. Duels are far in between. Like I said above, assassination is the way to get justice in these arts, not from a fair duel. Threats and challenges are often called off by the duelers. In formal fights, there are seconds and even written agreements. If no cooler heads intervene or if none cackles before the duel, then the duel (*bahad*) could occur. Mostly fights are ambushes with bolos or pinute, which often results in death or serious injury. There also have been verifiable cases where their Balintawak skills have saved them from attacks and possible death. Alleged death matches were just regular stick fights within the club and test of skills and sometimes from external challenges, none of which were serious enough. As for challenges, the better attitude is, Do not let your expertise get into you head! It is good to have skills and to know self-defense but it is no guarantee of survival. Avoid braggadocio you may get to live longer on this earth.

Trained martial artists are more circumspect with their knowledge and its deadly risks, let alone the legal consequences, of course. There are more bravado and bluster than real duels. In eskrima, there can be serious beatings that seldom results in death except when weapons such as guns, bolos and knives are used. There were of course gun battles and treacherous attacks which lead to death that have gained notoriety. They scarcely used skill, only deceit and

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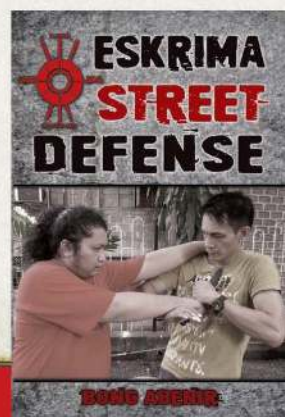
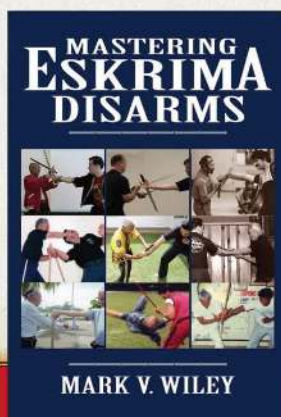
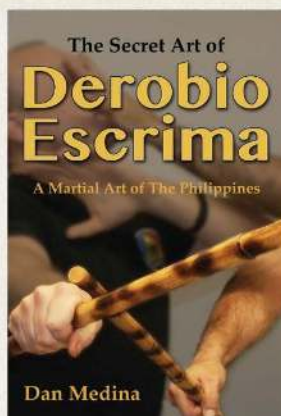
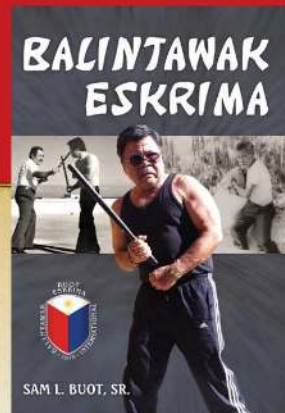


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