

THE SECRET ART OF DEROBIO ESCRIMA



THE SECRET ART OF DEROBIO ESCRIMA

A Martial Art of the Philippines



DAN MEDINA



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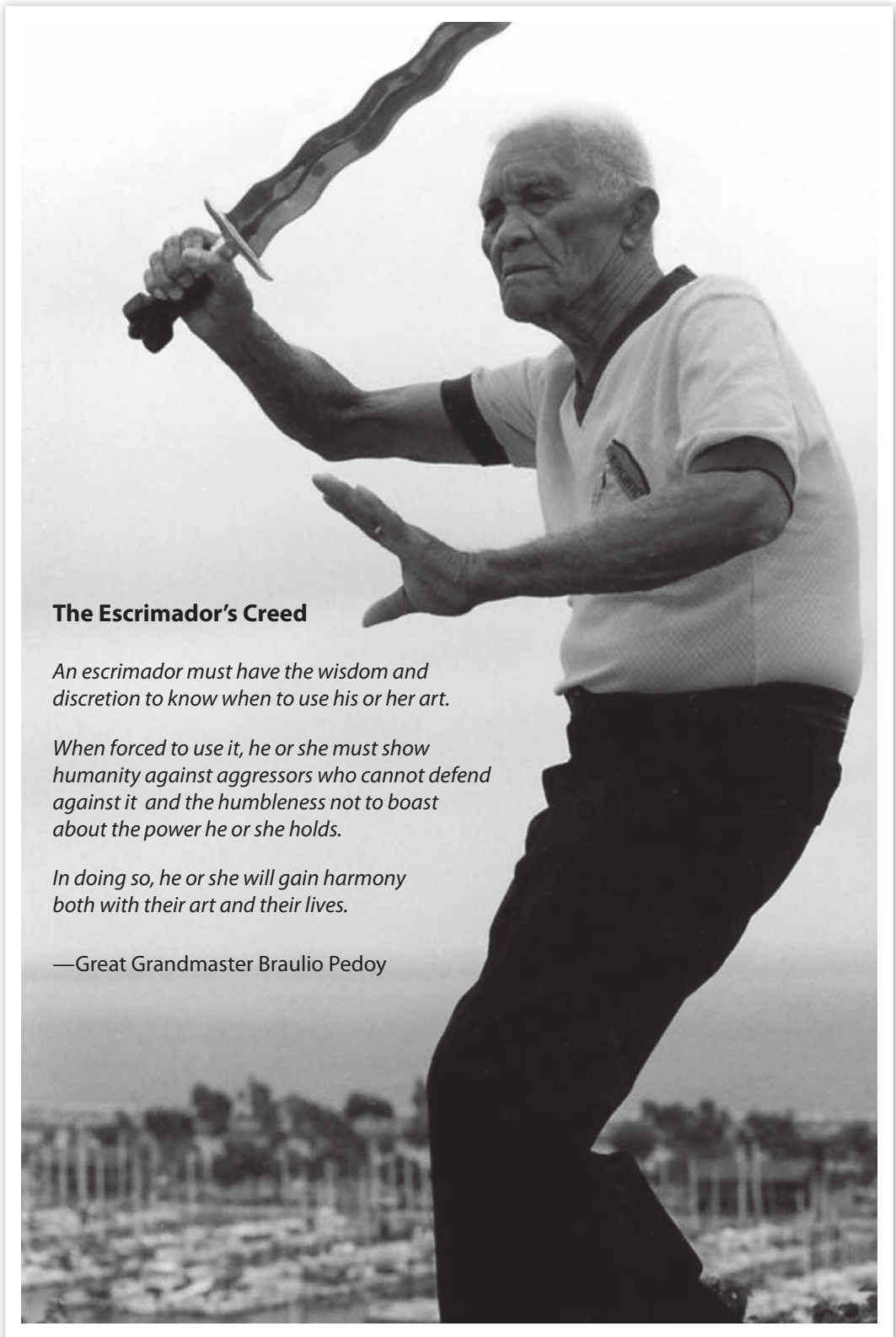
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The Escrimador's Creed

An escrimador must have the wisdom and discretion to know when to use his or her art.

When forced to use it, he or she must show humanity against aggressors who cannot defend against it and the humbleness not to boast about the power he or she holds.

In doing so, he or she will gain harmony both with their art and their lives.

—Great Grandmaster Braulio Pedoy



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Photo Credit: Steve R. Leimberg

Thank you, all.

—Grandmaster Dan Medina
Kingsland, Georgia 2014



FOREWORD

The martial arts of the Philippines are so vast and varied, one cannot count them all. It is impossible. Why? Because unlike the martial arts of Japan, Okinawa and China, Filipino martial artists have not placed much emphasis on lineage. That is to say, keeping record of their actual teachers, their teacher's teachers and so on; nor maintaining the name of the style through the generations. Indeed, because the Filipino martial arts are in a constant state of development, how can one attribute the knowledge of a skilled teacher of this generation to one of the past, where perhaps half of his accumulated techniques, his personal innovation, were not present? And so today, trying to piece together a lineage of sorts in Escrima is a task needing a team of forensic specialists to determine what is "traditional" to the Philippines and what is "borrowed in" from other arts.

In my own research, I have looked to the past generation of masters to try to better understand these dynamic fighting arts. During the time of fabled masters such as the Saavedra and Romo clans of Cebu, Antonio Ilustrisimo, Benjamin Luna Lema, Anciong Bacon and others, there was no YouTube, no Internet, and no DVDs. But there was great distrust amongst those outside one's group, and thus very little cross-training. The arts were held close to the chest, imparted only to family members and students. The arts of this time period, for me, represent a treasure of what the original Filipino arts may have been like. This book, *The Secret Art of Derobio Escrima*, offers us just such a glimpse into the art and life of an Escrima master of the past generation. The art of Braulio Pedoy.

This book presents in grand detail the often fantastical life and learning of Braulio Pedoy. From the small towns and jungles of the Philippines we learn how Pedoy came to meet his masters, perfect his skills and later bring the art to Hawaii. That Pedoy came to Hawaii like many Filipinos of his generation is nothing special. But the fact that he became one of the fabled escrimadors of that era in Hawaii, is especially noteworthy. He stood out amongst the likes of Floro Villabrille, Raymond Tobosa, Telesporo Subingsubing, Daniel Sisnores, and others whose arts and names became legendary even though few carry on their traditions today. Pedoy was the first to open an "open-door" club in Hawaii and saw to it that his art of Derobio would continue on. Grandmaster Dan Medina, one of Pedoy's disciples, has taken the mantle to ensure the art's continuation.

And so within the pages of this book are found the history, spiritual traditions, respects, basic strikes, systems of counters, locks and counter-locks of Derobio Escrima—an art preserved and passed along intact from generation to generation, drawing a clear lineage of past teachers and present masters.



—Dr. Mark V. Wiley
Publisher, Tambuli Media



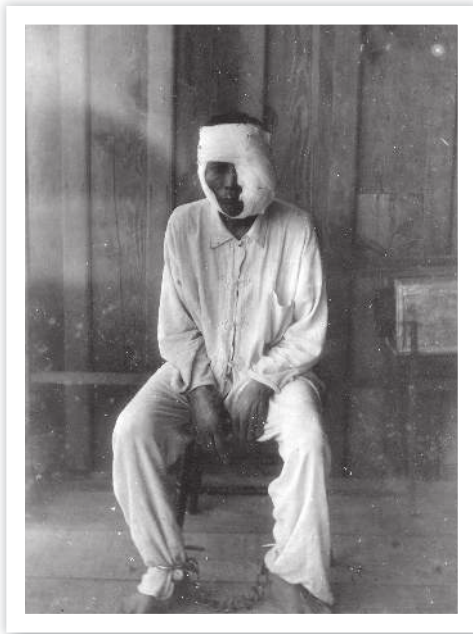
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CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF DEROBIO ESCRIMA



Documented photo of General Faustino Ablin after his capture by 2nd Lt. Ralph A Jones, in command of a detachment of the eighth infantry and Philippine Scouts.

**Photo courtesy of J.F. Ptak*

General Faustino Ablin

General Faustino Ablin was born on February 4th, 1854 on the Philippine island of Leyte, in the city of Ormoc. He was eighth out of nine children. According to various sources, he was not a very educated man yet he was a leader of many men. At first he was the leader of the Dios Dios Religious movement during the Spanish occupation of the Philippines. This was during a time when the poor of the Philippines were being taken advantage of by the upper castes, Spanish and Mestizos. What Ablin lacked for in education he more than made up for in motivation, character, and faith. How else could he command more than 500 men?

Faustino Ablin was more than just a mere bandit; he was also known as a patriot and a hero, depending on which side one was on. *Overland Monthly* and *Out West Magazine* (vol. 57) ran an article titled, "Justice Un-tempered," and quotes Governor Pedro Soler as saying that he considered Faustino Ablin "the greatest of the outlaw chiefs, with a huge army at his command."

General Ablin's constant harassment of the Spanish finally led to his capture and imprisonment sometime around the 1887-89 timeframe. The General was sent to a Spanish penal colony in Zamboanga, which is in the southernmost part of the Philippines. There he was kept imprisoned for the next 10 years.

It was said by Grandmaster Braulio Pedoy, that General Ablin led the forces of Leyte against the Spanish before the Spanish American War (1898). After the war Ablin was released from the penal colony, and made his way back to Leyte. Ablin refused to salute the American flag as long as it flew over the Philippine flag. He said, "Too many Filipino's died fighting for independence; besides we did not lose a war against the US so why should the American flag fly over it?" General Faustino Ablin saw no difference between the Spanish he had fought and been imprisoned by and the new American colonizers. He had fought for independence from

Spanish rulers. He now found himself confronted by the American government which, in Ablin's perspective, basically replaced the Spanish.

Ablin went from being the leader of the Dios Dios movement to taking the leadership of the Pulahan movement in Leyte. Faustino Ablin brought fear and apprehension to the Americans. He constantly harassed the new government and in doing so earned a huge price on his head. The Pulahan brought death and destruction with them and were reputed to be fearless. Before battle, the Pulahan went through religious rituals where they shaved their heads and tied whicker around their extremities. This served to slow their bleeding should they be injured or shot. This technique was remarkably effective. The Pulahan did not fear death; this movement was very strong in Leyte.

It was during this time period, that US soldiers found out that the military issue .38 caliber pistol and the Kraig rifle did little stop these religious foes. In response to this and what was also occurring in other parts of the Philippines, the US Government issued the .45 caliber pistol with its much needed stopping power. At least that's what the soldiers were told. They soon realized that even after being knocked down by the impact of the larger bullet, their determined foes often got up again only to decapitate their enemy. As a result, leather collars were issued to US soldiers in an effort to keep their heads from being cut off. Hence, the nickname "leather necks."

There are many stories about Faustino Ablin's capture and death. His death was exaggerated many times. Some say he was caught and hanged, others say he was taken away to never be heard from again. In the book *Policing America's Empire* by A.W. McCoy, Ablin's capture late in 1907 is mentioned; but again, it says nothing about his death.

GM Pedoy's account says he escaped and finally went deep into the Amandawin Mountains to live the life of a hermit. This falls in line with what is written in the "U.S. Congressional



Serial Set" and the "Annual Report of the Secretary of War," printed by the U.S. government. This volume reports that 2nd Lt. Ralph A Jones, in command of a detachment of eight infantry and Philippine Scouts operating from La Paz, encountered Ablin in the Madagara River. Ablin was caught unawares, shot, and captured. In this official historical account General Faustino Ablin escaped six days after his capture. There is never any mention of his recapture to this day.

GGM Pedoy & Master Ron England



Master Pedoy served as body guard for Datu Piang, after defeating the previous body guard in bloody battle

**Photo courtesy of Siangco Family*

Grandmaster Braulio Tomada Pedoy

I am honored to say that Grandmaster Braulio Pedoy was not only the most influential person in my martial arts career, but also something of a second father to me. His story is a tale almost mythical and folkloric in its own right. Close to the turn of the century, at a time of social unrest and brutality, when the many islands of the Philippines and their respective factions each fought for dominance over its neighbors, a young boy of about six years old embarked on a journey to escape the tyranny of a cruel and abusive father.

After receiving a particularly harsh beating one evening, the young Braulio decided it was time to leave all that he had known as home in the hope of a better life. Thin, alone, and with only a meager supply of provisions, he escaped his childhood residence and set off into the mountains without so much as a glance as to what he had left behind. It was a decision that would test his mind, body, and soul to the extreme.

The journey was a long one, and with what little he could afford to bring with him, starvation and dehydration proved a constant, grueling pair of combatants. After traveling just a short while, the young Pedoy was presented with his first obstacle: a fork in the road. One path was the familiar road to the city—where he knew he could surely find help and food—but this road ran the risk of him being found. In addition to this hindrance, he did not want to wind up with what he called the *piyo* (or rugged boys), a bunch of pick pockets and ruffians who made their living by stealing from others. The thought of becoming an immoral street rat was not one the boy found entirely appealing; especially when placed next to the second choice. This road lead deep into the mountainous jungles of the untamed Philippines. To Braulio, this path seemed the very embodiment of excitement and adventure. His choice was obvious. He chose the winding path through the mountains; quite literally a path that was destined to change his life forever.



Another painful lock applied on G.M. Medina



Grandmaster Pedoy and Grandmaster Subing

small shack nestled deep in the Amandiwin Mountains. At the time, nobody was there; only the smoke from a still-smoldering fire somebody had recently built. And so the young master waited until the occupant returned.

As it turns out, the owner was none other than General Faustino Ablin (*aka* Papa Ablen), who was more than shocked to come across a small boy sitting by his shack. He had thought no one would ever find him, much less a child. Years of exile and solitude certainly didn't prepare for this surprise. After questioning the boy and learning his tale, his surprise grew. How could such a child travel this great distance through the mountains and jungles which were laden with dangerous creatures, poisonous insects, wild animals and many unseen dangers. General



Sr. Master Carlton Kramer with G.M. Pedoy

It was not long before what little food Braulio had brought were exhausted, and hunger set in once again. Even at his extraordinarily young age, the grandmaster-to-be demonstrated his level head and will to survive at any cost by observing what sort of foods the monkeys and boars ate. He reckoned that if the animals would eat it, it was safe for him as well. After four sleepless nights and five agonizingly draining days of travel, he happened upon a

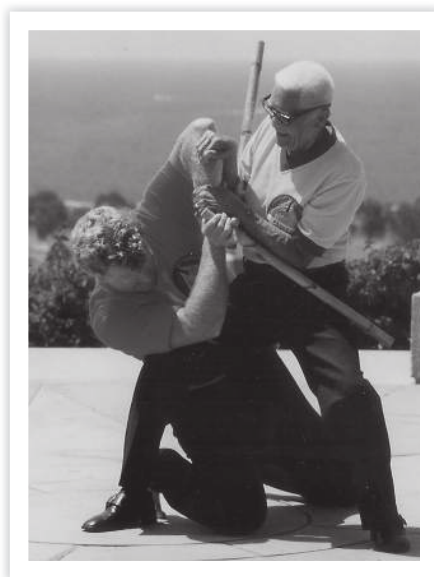
Ablin asked the young boy if he had seen any snakes or any other deadly surprises along his journey, surprisingly, the answer was no. The general was a deeply religious man and considered this child to be sent by God. Ablin told Pedoy, "God has guided you to me." The next day Ablin told him, "I need to show you what's around here, so make sure you stay close to me or I will not be able to protect you." Off they went, and even though Braulio was young he had the hardest time keeping up with this 50+ year old who seemed to move like the wind. He was shown all the dangers that lurked in the mountains, including snakes that

were big enough to fill a 55 gallon drum. General Ablin taught him the ways of the jungle as well as the art of Derobio Escrima.

For 11 years Pedoy learned and studied all his master had to teach him. Finally the day came when General Ablin announced that he had taught him all he had to teach and that it was time for Pedoy to go. “Tonight you will need to stand vigil and pray,” Ablin said, and “make your peace with God, for tomorrow we fight.” Braulio would have to face General Ablin for his final exam; a potentially-deadly one on one test of skills. Both men would be armed with bolos and it would be to the death. The reason that the exam was to the death was that there was no medical help within several days journey; if either of them would become seriously wounded, a slow miserable death would be eminent. Ablin told his young pupil, “If you are injured, I will kill you because I do not wish you to suffer and I expect you to do the same for me.” With these ominous words ringing in his ears, Pedoy spent many sleepless hours awaiting his final test. At 17 Pedoy had the stamina youth could afford him, but it was equally matched by the experience of the now 62 year old general. Both used their best faints and counters. Braulio sustained three wounds; the first was across the bridge of his nose, the second at the base of his right thumb and the third under his chin. After almost three hours of intense fighting, both were exhausted. As hard as he had tried, Pedoy could not touch General Ablin; but he had survived the skirmish. These were scars that he proudly wore as badges of honor.



G.M. Pedoy and G.M. Villabrille



Sr. High Chief Knut Peacock and G.M. Pedoy

Next, Ablin took Braulio to a mountain pond. He told Braulio to climb to the top of the tree that looked over the pond. Ablin said, “Look down into the water and tell me what you see?” Braulio said he saw a bunch of bamboo stakes just below the surface of the water. “Now,” the general said, “jump!” The young man was hesitant to do so. Again, General Ablin commanded him to do so, saying, “Have faith, jump!” And jump he did. Much to Pedoy’s amazement, he didn’t die. He wasn’t even hurt when he hit the water, and when he looked around, he saw no bamboo stakes; he only saw bamboo leaves floating on the surface of the water. It was only an illusion the general had created to test the mental and spiritual skills he needed to survive. Braulio Pedoy was now ready to go out into the world but the general had a few more lessons to share.

“Study the movements of the trees and the ocean,” he told his pupil, “for they both have lessons to teach. Observe the motion of the branches in the wind. The tree stands strong, yet the branches pass the power of the wind as you must pass a blow and return to an equal and balanced position before reaching out with your own counter.” Next he said, “Climb to the top of the highest tree and look out unto the ocean.” He told his young student, “You will see different shades of blue, the darker the blue the deeper the water. In the lighter areas it is shallow, rough and noisy. Many are at this level. Close minded people with conflicting goals in life tend to use their mouths loosely. We must strive for the deeper water where it’s calm and peaceful, where your morals run deep and only pure thoughts come out of your mouth. Thus you can observe for yourself what is shallow and what is deep. Now it’s time for you to leave. Go Island to Island and learn from all the different masters. When you’re done, make your way to America where you will do well.” The young Pedoy wished his master a good life and embarked on his next journey.



Datu Piang

**Photo courtesy of Piang.net*

Before traveling to other islands, Pedoy decided to stop at his home to visit his father. But the visit was not well received. After seeing things had not changed much, Braulio continued onward. After traveling to many of the Islands and studying from as many masters as would teach him, Braulio found that every village had different styles of fighting. Pedoy once said that some systems relied on sound—once the crack of weapons was heard, that was the indicator to counter the attack. One of the last places the young Pedoy found himself was in the southern Philippines. There, he said that the Moro fighters had incorporated a special skill that was adapted to their environment. Living primarily on or near beaches, these fighters used footwork that sprayed their opponent’s faces with sand as they fought, crippling their eyes with sharp blinding shrapnel. This technique was unique but also limited as they relied upon it heavily and found

themselves somewhat handicapped on more solid ground. But on sand it was like fighting a whirlwind. This and many more things he learned.

Later in his travels the young master found himself in Mindanao, there he was presented with yet another challenge. Rumors of a fierce fighter, Datu Piang’s bodyguard, who was terrorizing the town’s people, reached his ears. Many told tales of rape, extortion and bullying. Although the young Braulio was new to this town he felt something had to be done. So he entered a tournament the bodyguard was fighting in. Much like in the old movies, many of the towns people turned up to watch justice hopefully be served. The battle lasted only a few minutes, each looking for an opening as they tested each other’s defenses. As circle after circle was paced in the sand each combatant scanned the other for weaknesses. Pedoy’s sharp eye found a slight

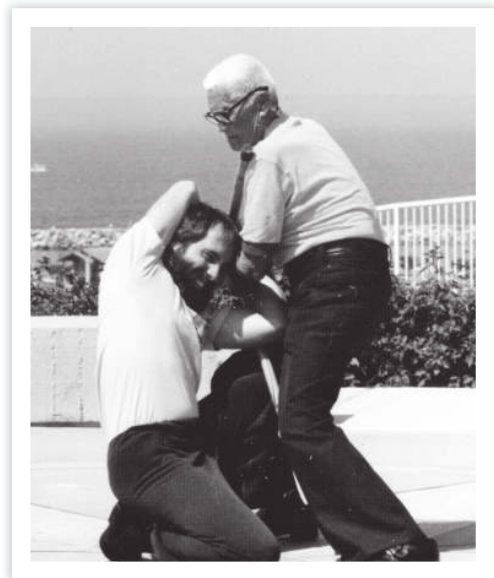
moment of distraction, and took his chance. It was just enough for him to inflict a critical blow, shattering the man's left collar bone. The spectators cheered and, caught up in their own quest for vengeance, chanted a request for death. "Kill him! Kill him!" they chanted and yelled "kill him!" Master Pedoy heard the words of his master ringing clear in his mind, of showing mercy to those who could not defend themselves. He looked at the angry crowd and said, "You want to kill him?" He threw his weapon on the ground. "You want him dead? You do it!" He turned his back and walked away leaving the injured man to tend to his wounds and perhaps learn a lesson from this encounter. Having defeated and disabled Datu Piang's bodyguard, Pedoy was now offered the vacant position. His salary was 100 pesos a month. Pedoy then traveled far and wide, his travels reaching as far as Borneo where he studied the movements of the Dayak head hunters. Master Pedoy loved to tell tales of his travels.



G.G.M. Pedoy demonstrating the use of double bolos

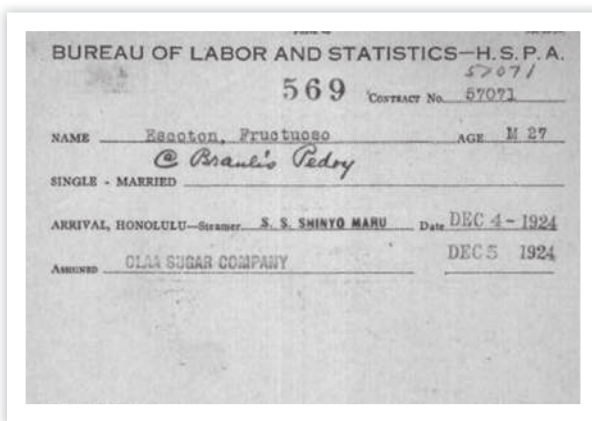
The Brilliance Tribe

While following his master's instructions of traveling from island to island to learn as much as he could from as many masters as possible, Pedoy found himself in a very mountainous region on a narrow muddy path, a result of the recent rains. This made for a treacherous journey, with the mountain rising up on one side and a steep down slope on the other. Along with it being an extremely remote location, the last thing the young Pedoy thought would happen did. With one misplaced step, he lost his footing and slipped, hurtling down the side of the jungle covered mountain. When he finally came to a stop, he painfully realized in addition to many cuts and scrapes his shoulder was dislocated. Knowing that there wouldn't be anyone coming along to help him, Pedoy knew that it was up to him to reposition his shoulder. After a while, he finally saw what he was looking for; a tree with exposed roots on the side of the mountain. He managed to squeeze his hand through a small hole in the roots. After a few ginger test pulls, he balled his hand into a fist and hurtled himself back in a single brutal motion. A yelp escaped his lips, as his shoulder was sent back into its original place. The excruciating pain flushed over his body and the soothing black of unconsciousness took over. When he awoke



GGM & Ron 1988

he found himself in what seemed to be an enormous cavern. He was not alone. He was being cared for by what appeared to be a primitive tribe and although that in itself would not have been unusual, the fact that they were fair skinned was. This tribe referred to themselves as the Brilliante people. An isolated group that had little to no contact with the other tribes in the area. He also learned that they possessed some remarkable abilities that included the arts of moving through the jungles unseen and unheard a well, as skillful navigation of the endless caverns that were in the area. This amazing tribe cared for Master Pedoy's injuries and nursed him back to health. Once he had recovered, Pedoy was given some food and sent on his way. The only payment they accept for their services was a promise from Braulio to keep their home a secret.



From the Docks of Manila to Hawaii

Eventually the young Master Pedoy found himself working on the docks of Manila as a longshore man. But he knew that was not the life for him. He could still hear his master's words ringing in his ears, "Travel to America." So, around 1924, he took his chance and, using his friend's workman's papers, he booked passage on the steamer S.S. Shinyo Maru,

under the assumed name of Escoton Fructuoso, and made his way to Hawaii, arriving there on December 4th, 1924. On December 5th, he was quickly assigned work on the Ola'a sugar cane plantation. All the workers were bundled to work together. The Chinese were grouped with other Chinese and the Filipinos were grouped with other Filipinos. This was a good time for Filipino martial arts because it gave the different practitioners a chance to train together. The inner secrets, however, were not shared with others.

Grandmaster Pedoy and the Supernatural

Although a very religious man, Braulio Pedoy had many strong convictions and beliefs that delved into the realm of the supernatural. As in many old countries, there is often a subtle blend between religion, folklore and superstition. Having spent most of his impressionable years in the Philippine jungles, Pedoy adapted many of the local beliefs which were mixed with Christianity. One of his favorite tales included the belief in the *anting-anting*, using the magical power of words, charms and prayers. The charms could be anything from small amulets, human knee caps or bones, to vials of holy oils. I remember that he wore a belt under his cloths that contained some of these items. One night I asked if he would show it to me and to my surprise he did. The belt was made of cloth with sealed pockets. Inside, he claimed to have various small bones, some of them human knee caps. He offered out the pouch containing one of the knee

caps. “Try to touch this, and watch how it runs away from you,” he said with an impish grin on his face. As hard as I tried it kept slipping from my grasp. I spent many a night listening to his many tales.

One tale was about the heart of the banana tree. In the Philippines banana trees grew everywhere. This story started in the cemetery as yet another challenge in his life. Pedoy spent many a night in the cemetery where he would go at night and wait for the banana tree flower to bloom. As the legend goes, if you can catch the seed of the flower when it blooms, it will give you special powers. This kind of reminds me of the plains Indians and peyote they use in their spiritual ceremonies. But before these powers can be bestowed the receiver must prove his worthiness by battling spirits. Whether the seed caused hallucinations or actual apparitions came, we will never know. But master Pedoy tells of a great battle between himself and these unearthly attackers. Even a short glance into these spirits eyes could leave you mesmerized and defenseless, which would result in your death. Pedoy reveals the key to survival was not to gaze at the eyes but focus on the chest instead. Master Pedoy survived this ordeal and was awarded the special powers he was seeking, his rarely seen ability to control the bleeding of wounds as well as his bodily functions. He has been known to pierce his tongue, hand and forearms using a piece of bamboo with no visible signs of blood.

While writing this story, another tale came to mind. In his youth Pedoy had said that when most Filipinos arrived in Hawaii they were expected to work in the cane and pineapple fields, but doing hard labor and working like a mule was not for him. Luckily Grandmaster Pedoy was a very good gambler and was able to make a living at it. Also we must remember the time period was the great depression and Hawaii was a very hard place. On the plantations the workers were worked down to dusk and to the point of exhaustion for very little pay. As usual, Pedoy would wait until the workers got paid and he would gamble with them, winning most of the time. One night, though, he gambled with a sore loser who was livid at having lost his pay. Then late one night the sore loser spent several hours waiting in the shadows, plotting his revenge. He got ready to ambush the young gambler as he passed by. As Pedoy passed the dark alley, he was unexpectedly attacked by the disgruntled loser who jumped out



Kavai Park Luau honoring Kali Grandmaster Floro Villabrille (seated). Front row: G.M. Braulio Pedoy, Zena Sixtana Babao and Joey Del Mar. Back row: Richard Bustillo, Ben Largusa, Lucky Lucay -Lucay and Dan Inosanto.



Peter Schmall, Knut Peacock, Ron England, Dan Medina, Master Pedoy



Cas Magda, Martinez, Master Pedoy, Dan Inosanto, Richard Bustillo, Peter Schmall

from his hiding place and buried his dagger deep into the master's belly. A few seconds later, the attacker was battered, bruised and unconscious with master Pedoy sitting on him while waiting for the police and ambulance to arrive. Master Pedoy was rushed to the hospital, but on arrival he was pronounced DOA (dead on arrival). The truth was, he had actually slowed down his heart beat and breathing so he would not bleed out. At the hospital he was tagged and left in the emergency room, covered with only a thin white sheet in preparation for transfer to the morgue on the next shift.

That night as one of the nurses was making her rounds, Master Pedoy awoke and upon seeing the nurse, sat up and yelled out, "Excuse me, but I'm freezing! Get me a blanket!" The poor startled nurse ran out of the room screaming.

Magical Tree in a Bottle

The next item the grandmaster showed me was a small bottle of oil that was always in his pocket. This is what he used when doing hilot, a type of healing massage which resembles acupressure but with holy words being spoken as it is being done. It is said that Pedoy cured a pinched nerve that Guru Dan Inosanto had, that no other doctor could resolve. This oil was also used in exorcism and all manners of healing. People came from all over seeking Pedoy's help. He never asked for money; if you were able to make a donation he would accept that. These donations would accumulate and when he could he would travel to the Philippines. The money would always go to the church of the famous healing shrine of the Potenciana, also known as the Saranza Chapel on the Island of Bohol. This was the home of Mrs. Pedoy and her relatives, so they tried to make a yearly visit. On one of these visits in a gesture of thanks the caretaker of the chapel gave Grandmaster Pedoy a bottle of wax from all the spent candles burning on the chapels alter. He gratefully thanked the old caretaker and when he arrived home he placed the bottle on his home alter. A few years later Pedoy had a stroke that paralyzed one side of his body. One evening while in bed Pedoy glanced towards his alter and he remembered the bottle from the healing shrine and asked his wife to bring it to him. To his great astonishment the wax had melted into oil and there was a very small tree growing inside. He wondered how a tree could grow in wax oil. It must be a sign, he thought. He then started to massage himself with this oil and pray and soon found himself feeling better. In a couple of weeks, he was cured! In order to always keep the bottle full, he replaced what oil was used with coconut oil. As time passed the tree continued to grow, along with the legend of it's and master Pedoy's healing powers. Many a famous Escrimador visited and asked that he share this oil with them, to no avail. This was only shared with his inner circle of students that had achieved full instructor status and only one outsider that I'm aware of—the Babao Family. As

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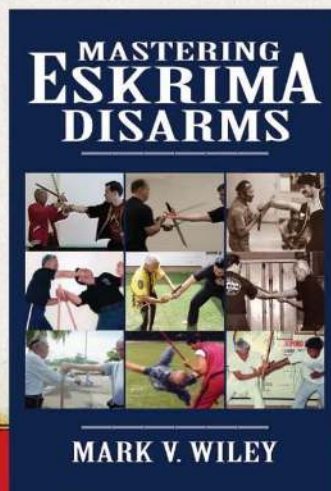
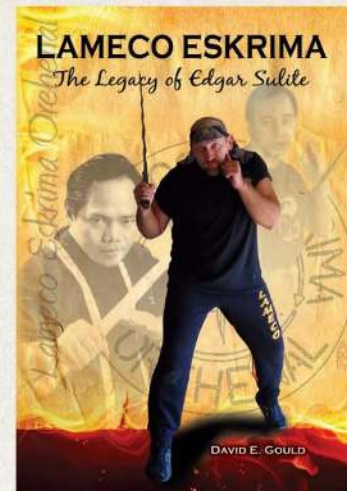
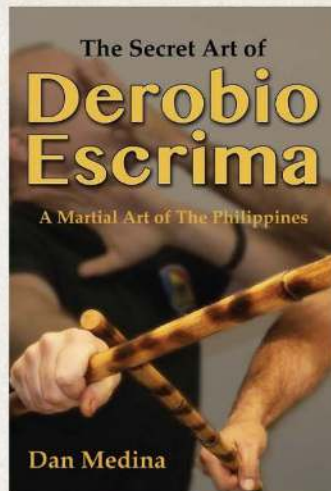
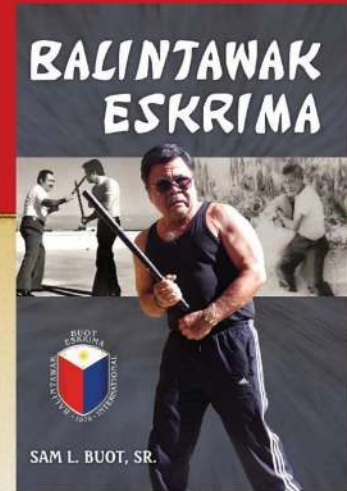


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