

# Filipino Martial Arts

Digest

## Babao Arnis

Special Edition  
2009

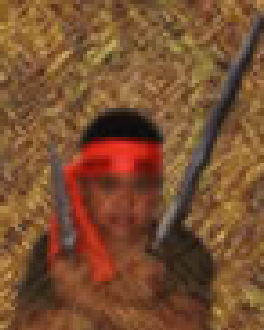
Grandmaster Narrie Babao



Guro's Narrison and Jack Babao



Jayson Babao



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The ideas and opinions expressed in this digest are those of the authors or instructors being interviewed and are not necessarily the views of the publisher or editor.

We solicit comments and/or suggestions. Articles are also welcome.

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## From the Publishers Desk

### Kumusta

The FMA Digest met both Grandmaster Narrie Babao and Zena Babao in Anaheim in 2005 at the WFMAA. Before that living in San Diego, our paths never crossed, however The FMA Digest had heard many good things about Grandmaster Babao.



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It was during the WFMAA event that the FMA Digest first asked Zena Babao to contribute an article or two and since she has submitted and contributed many articles and has greatly helped in more than a few Special Issues and Special Editions. In as much she was awarded FMA Digest - Pantas ng Panulat "Masters of the Pen" for 2009.

Knowing Grandmaster Babao you know he is a professional in all aspects, serious in teaching Babao Arnis. His frankness, honesty, and dedication to the Filipino martial arts is a mark of a true Escrimador. It has been an honor and privilege in knowing Grandmaster Narrie Babao.

The FMA Digest hopes you will enjoy this Special Edition and learn about Grandmaster Babao and his family and some of his students who have had the privilege to learn and train with him.



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**Maraming Salamat Po**



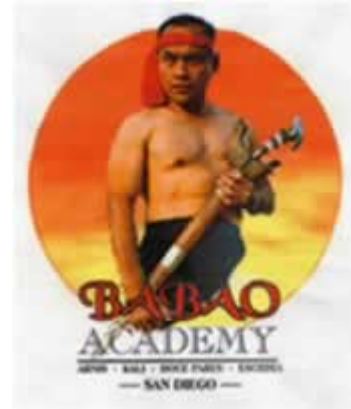
The FMA Digest wants to thank Zena Sultana Babao, who has written about her family and coordinated the other articles for this Special Edition. A little about Zena Babao: a professional journalist, writes the columns "Light and Shadows" and "Making it in America" for the Asian Journal U.S.A, San Diego Edition, and now also writes for the prestigious "Elvis International" magazine circulated worldwide. She is also the "Vegas and Around the World" reporter with [www.ladyluckmusic.com](http://www.ladyluckmusic.com), a website in Canada that features Elvis impersonators and fans from around the world. In the Philippines, she wrote for the Philippine News Service (now Philippines News Agency), and still contributes articles for Manila Times and Sun Star Manila.

## Introduction

Babao Arnis is not a commercial school. It's kind of a club only, limited to 10 students and no more. As of now they only have 7 students. They don't accept anyone below 18 years of age. Grandmaster Narrie Babao is very selective in accepting students, so they can only get in if they are recommended by someone in the Filipino martial arts community. Then the prospective student undergoes an interview and security check. Of 10 who apply, probably only one is accepted.

Through all the years (35 years or so) only a few became Guros and maybe only 3 or four also teach Babao Arnis. They don't teach Babao Arnis exclusively, but combine it with other Filipino martial arts. No one has a commercial school either. They have only between 1 to 4 students, and they also hold classes in their garage just like the Grandmaster.

In the late 70's or early 80's Grandmaster Babao opened a commercial school. At that time Arnis and Eskrima was not known to the public yet (unlike today). Only a handful enrolled, probably 5 or 6. Zena Babao had to work another job, aside from her fulltime regular job in order to pay for the lease, insurance, and overhead expenses. After six months of doing that, Zena contacted the management of the business establishment where they were leasing and negotiated to be released from the lease. It was so grueling for her to work two jobs, take care of three boys, cook and clean the house, and also go back to school for her Masters Degree.



## The Evolution of Babao Arnis

By Zena Sultana Babao



It was not until we moved to the United States in 1973, when I learned that my husband, Narrie Babao, is an expert in the Filipino martial arts called Arnis de Mano. This was four years after we were married. At that time, the Filipino combative arts were really secret arts, passed down within the family. Narrie told me that his father, the late Buenaventura "Turing" Babao, started teaching him the Batangas method of Arnis in 1963, three years before we met. All I knew was that Narrie was a black belt in karate.

Narrie and I met on a blind date. I was a reporter for Naga Times in the Philippines, when I was asked by Rafael Plantado to become the master of ceremony for his karate club's benefit demo, dinner and dance. Rafael Plantado was the owner of the Griffins Karate Club, the largest of the martial arts schools in Naga City at the time. Rafael was assisted by his elder brother, Romeo "Romy" Plantado, in teaching judo and Shotokan karate.

One of their brown belts, Narrie Babao, was selected to pick me up, and be my official escort.

During the karate demonstration, the Plantado brothers broke boards and concrete cinder blocks with their bare hands and feet. Narrie demonstrated his expertise in breaking a large flat stone, and a thick empty bottle of Coca-Cola. The broken bottle nicked his right hand in the process. He showed me the cut, and I offered my handkerchief to stop the bleeding.

The crowd went wild during the sparring exhibitions. And to add that cinematic effect, the live band played the "James Bond Theme". Romy asked four of the students to fight him at the same time, and none of them scored on Plantado. After a minute, Romy asked to spar with Narrie. At first the crowd was perplexed when they saw spots of red blood on Romy's white gi. They later realized it was from Narrie's bleeding hand. The finale of the sparring exhibition was when the Plantado brothers fought each other. It was hard to tell who outscored whom.



Narrie Babao and Romeo Plantado

belts. After the eliminations and semifinals, only one will become the ultimate champion.

By the luck of the draw, the Plantado brothers fought each other in the earlier rounds. Romy did his best to outscore his brother Rafael. The blows and kicks were supposed to be controlled, but anybody who ever sparred with Romy



Narrie and Zena's wedding in Naga City

After a few months, the Griffins Karate Club sponsored the first karate tournament in the Bicol region. Most of the competitors were from the Griffins, followed by the Tigers Karate Club, which was composed exclusively of practitioners of Chinese descent.

The unique thing about this tournament was that there were no particular divisions. The year was 1966, and karate was still new in the Philippines. All the competitors were mixed: white belts, green belts, brown belts, and black



Plantado knew otherwise. Back then there were no groin cups, no mouth pieces, nor pads to protect the hands, feet, shin, and elbow.

In the second group, Narrie worked his way to the semifinals by easily eliminating his opponents. The semifinals were composed of two pairs of competitors: Narrie versus Romy Plantado, and the other pair was between another brown belt and an unknown white belt.

Narrie lost by one point to Plantado. For the championship, Plantado had to fight the unknown white belt, who eventually won the match. The crowd knew very well that if the match had been to the death, Plantado would emerge the winner.

That tournament was the last time the general public witnessed Romy Plantado fight in friendly matches. A former police officer in Naga City, Romy Plantado became a fugitive when he was wrongly accused of killing a suspect during an interrogation.

Although Narrie was well qualified to test for black belt, the Plantado brothers did not have any certificate to award in their school. Narrie was always meticulous when it comes to being certified as a martial arts instructor. A friend of his convinced Narrie to travel to Manila and take a crash course in the Black Master Sphinx Karate system, under Master Jimmy Galez, the first karate instructor of the NBI (National Bureau of Investigations).

In a short span of time, Narrie learned a lot from Jimmy Galez. He was promoted to the rank of first dan, and Narrie became the leading exponent of Sphinx Karate in the Bicol region.

Narrie even went as far as Dalaguete, Cebu, his mother's hometown. And after being asked by Fr. Jose Cervantez, the parish priest, Narrie agreed to teach karate to the church's altar boys. He stayed for around three months in the church's convent, just meditating and teaching the altar boys. His mentoring came to a sudden halt when he received notice to report to Sangley Point in Cavite, for a written and physical exam, the first process in enlisting with the United States Navy. Narrie preferred to join the United States Marine Corps, but that window of opportunity was not open yet. The only agreement between the governments of the Philippines and the United States was for Filipino men to enlist with the Navy.

In February of 1968, Narrie swore his allegiance to defend the United States from all enemies, both foreign and domestic. After the basic boot camp in San Diego, Narrie was assigned to a brand-new amphibious and helicopter assault carrier, the USS New



Jimmy Galez



Orleans. Some of the crewmembers had seen Narrie practicing his karate katas, and they too wanted to learn. One of his students was a Navy lieutenant, who was a karate brown belt. Two enlisted men from the Marine Amphibious Unit also joined.

It was at this time when Narrie first started teaching the Arnis that he learned from his father. No doubt that it is a very effective form of fighting even back then, when Arnis was not yet classified as a bona fide martial art. During one of the Marine's amphibious missions, one of Narrie's Marine students was flown back to the ship in a body bag. Narrie had nothing to do with this.



As a young sailor on board the  
USS New Orleans



Griffins karate club in Naga city in 1966, he was still endorsing Latino Gonzales, the grand old man of karate in the Philippines.

During his visit to Naga in 1972, Narrie learned that his former sensei, Romeo Plantado, was recaptured and was in the custody of the PC (Philippine Constabulary). He was captured a year earlier by the local police. However, Plantado managed to overpower the prison guards, killing one of them, and escaped with two Carbine rifles.

This time, Plantado was in his own isolated cell inside the PC compound. Being a police reporter, I was able to convince the PC provincial commander to let us interview Plantado. We even brought along our first born, Narrison, who was in a baby carrier. Plantado was happy to see us, and he did not hold anything back during the interview. He said he had to shoot the prison guard, because that guard was in the way of his prison break.

While not patrolling the Vietnam waters, the New Orleans would dock in Subic Bay, Philippines, for loading of provisions and for necessary repairs. Narrie and I got married in September 1969. The ship was in the Philippines, and Narrie took his first annual military leave.

Subic Bay is located in Olongapo City. Narrie found out that Carlito Lanada opened a Philippine Kuntaw headquarters in Olongapo City. When Lanada visited the



Grandmaster Carlito Lanada's visit  
to the Griffins Karate Club

When the topic went back to Plantado's first case about the teenage suspect who died while in police custody, he vehemently denied having killed the boy. He told Narrie he only slapped the kid. The killing that Plantado was really proud of was when he fought another toughie in Naga City in a mutual combat. This happened when Plantado was a fugitive. It was a flying front kick to the chest that felled the other guy. Plantado left the scene, unsure if his opponent was dead. The downed opponent was dying when the police reached the scene. He was able to tell the cops that he fought Plantado in a hand-to-hand combat. Narrie found it hard to believe that Plantado's flying kick actually killed his opponent.

It was not until years later, after Narrie studied CPR, that a broken sternum on a person's chest could do more harm than good on that person's heart. Plantado told us a movie producer from Manila already wanted to make a movie about his life. He was advised that the only setback was that he was still alive. Narrie was planning to write an article about Romy Plantado for Black Belt magazine, so he was wondering if we could go to a nearby karate studio for a photo session. Again, I was the one who asked the PC Provincial Commander to accommodate us. So with two armed PC troopers watching, Narrie and Romy showed their karate skills for the camera.

We escorted Plantado back to his cell, and said our goodbyes. Once we got home, I realized that the .22 caliber revolver that Narrie gave me was inside my purse all along. I think because of my being a reporter, the PC troopers never bothered to inspect my purse. We found out years later that Plantado once again escaped, and joined the Communist-influenced New People's Army (NPA). He rose up through the ranks, and his nome de guerre was Commander Romy.

The Black Belt magazine rejected Narrie's article, explaining that it was too violent. It was not until 2004 when we learned that Romy Plantado passed away in Naga City due to heart failure.

In 1973, we relocated to San Diego, California. We have two sons then: one-year old Narrison, and newly born Jack. It seemed Narrie could not wait to impart his martial arts knowledge to his sons. It was at this period when I found out that Narrie studied Arnis de Mano from his father.

During the 1920's, Turing Babao learned the Baston Batangas Arnis from Ka Juan, a Katipunan rebel under General Miguel Malvar of Batangas. The practitioners of this system were not called Arnisadors or Mag-aarnis. They were referred to as Bastoneros. Turing's training partner under Ka Juan was his cousin, Nacing Babao Trillanes.

Turing Babao did not teach his Arnis system to anyone else but to Narrie. Their training started in Naga City in November of 1963, when Narrie was 18 years old. His father was suffering from hypertension, and the doctor advised him to pursue an active work out. Turing wanted to hit two birds with one stone, to get back into physical fitness, and to impart his martial arts knowledge.

Narrie was actually a reluctant disciple of Arnis. He had other interests. Foremost were bodybuilding and weightlifting. A year later, Narrie won the Jr. Mr. Philippines title, which was sponsored by the Philippine Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Association, which was headed by former Mr. Philippines, Eldy Doroteo.

For two years, the father and son trained hard in Arnis. Their training consisted mainly of free-style sparring with one stick, two long sticks, or with a long and a short



stick. Only after getting hit would Narrie learn the lesson for the day. His father would methodically explain why he got hit.

That was the old school of Arnis, the School of Hard Knocks. His father was precise in controlling his strikes to the body and head, but hits to the knuckles were unavoidable.

With his knuckles busted many times over, Narrie looked for a good excuse to take a sabbatical from Arnis training. He enrolled at the Griffins karate school, and that's how we met.

Every time Narrie went on leave in the Philippines, he would consult his father about Arnis techniques. Without a regular sparring partner, Turing's Arnis workouts diminished. He finally passed away, after a third stroke, in 1974.

Narrie had about a dozen of students at the Naval Training Center gym. The curriculum then consisted of Arnis and the barehanded Kuntao. Both of us joined the now defunct San Diego County Martial Arts Alliance. When Narrie told the president that his style was a mixture of Arnis and Kuntao, the president who was a Lima Lama blackbelt instructor queried, "What kind of animal is that?"

The members of the Alliance finally saw their first glimpse of the Filipino martial arts when Narrie started competing in tournaments. Stickfighting contest was still unheard of at that time, so Narrie had to contend in joining the Weapons Forms events.



Circa 1974  
Narrie, Zena, Narrison and Jack



Our kumpadre Dan Inosanto

Most of the time, Narrie and Ted Tabura, the Kama king, would vie for the championship trophy. In the history of Ed Parker's annual Long Beach Internationals tournament, Narrie was the first practitioner to demonstrate the use of the balisong knife in the weapons form competition.

It was sometime in 1975 when we met Danny Inosanto and his then partner, Richard Bustillo. Years earlier, Narrie had read that Dan was Bruce Lee's top student in Jeet Kune Do. He thought that

Dan was Japanese. It was not until reading an article in Inside Kung-fu about Eskrima, did Narrie learn that Dan was of Filipino descent. In a letter to the editor Narrie mentioned that he was a practitioner of Arnis de Mano, which was another method of

Filipino fighting system. Dan saw the letter to the editor, and that was how the flow of communication started.

On weekends, we would travel to the Filipino Kali Academy, and Dan and Narrie would constantly exchange Arnis, Kuntao and Eskrima techniques.

A year later, I gave birth to our youngest son, Kris, who was named after the wavy Moro blade. Dan Inosanto became our “kumpadre”, when he became the godfather of Kris.

It was also in 1976 when Inosanto introduced Narrie to Kali Master Ben Largusa, who accepted him as a disciple. It was in November of that same year, when Narrie and Inosanto formally introduced the arts of Arnis and Eskrima to the people of San Diego, California.



Kris' baptism with Dan as Ninong



The 1st all-weapons Kumite in 1978  
Grandmaster Ben Largusa.

It was in 1981 when Doce Pares Grandmaster Cacoy Canete arrived in the United States. He conducted a seminar at the Filipino Kali Academy, and that was how we met Manong Cacoy. Narrie was captivated by the close quarter combat fluidity of Eskrido, which was developed by Grandmaster Cacoy in 1948.

During his visit to the Cebu City Doce Pares headquarters in 1984, Narrie was promoted to the rank of 4th Grade Blackbelt. He met the elder Canete brothers, Grandmaster Yoling and Grandmaster Momoy. He also met the legendary Master Vicente “Inting” Carin and Grandmaster Diony Canete.

In July 1978, Narrie became the first Weapons Sparring Champion at a tournament sponsored by Kyukushinkai instructor Ben Singleton of Vista, California. This type of competition was the first of its kind in the American martial arts scene. The head referee was Solomon Kahewalu of the Hawaiian Lua system. Narrie defeated other fighters who used esoteric weapons like the Nunchakus, Bo, and Shinai. It was also on that same year when Narrie was promoted as Kali Guro’ by then Grandmaster Floro Villabrille and



Narrie with Grandmaster Ben Largusa

It was also in 1984, when Narrie was able to change his rating in the U.S. Navy from that of a Mess Specialist to that of a Master-at-Arms (MAA). In fact it took an “act of Congress” for him to change his rating. Narrie requested to change his rating twice, and both times was turned down by the Navy’s Bureau of Personnel. Narrie was told that the Mess Specialist rating was in a critical level, that the changing of ratings was not encouraged.

At the time, Congressman Duncan Hunter was still new at the House in Washington. He was aware of my articles in the local newspapers endorsing his candidacy since the first time he ran for Congress. We campaigned for Hunter, since he was a Vietnam veteran. He actually defeated an incumbent San Diego congressman, Lionel Van Deerlin. After he was elected, he appointed me as one of his advisers.

I mailed a letter to Congressman Hunter regarding Narrie’s situation in the Navy. In less than a month, Narrie received a memo from Congressman Hunter that he personally passed by the Bureau of Personnel and talked to the people in charge. Within a week, Narrie received a message from the Navy that he was allowed to change jobs.

The Master-at-Arms rating was the first designated rating in the U.S. Navy. The MAA’s original duties include being the keeper of the armory, and enforcer of the ship’s regulations. The modern MAA’s functions the same as that of the Military Police.



First tour as a  
Master-at-Arms on board the  
USS Belleau Wood

Narrie was on board the USS Belleau Wood when he converted as MAA. Right away, the ship’s Chief Master-at-Arms assigned him his first project- to retrain the ship’s MAA force and Shore Patrol in a better method of using the wooden baton and the steel Maglite flashlight. At the time, the Navy’s training manual was based on the Koga method of baton techniques. Robert Koga was a defensive tactic instructor for the LAPD.

Back in the Seventies, the CHP (California Highway Patrol) was the model agency for the other law enforcement groups in the state. Whatever the CHP would advise and adopt, the other agencies would usually follow. The training was usually done through the POST (Police Officers Standards and Training) course in Sacramento.

Before the CHP replaced their straight baton with the side-handled baton called the Prosecutor (PR-24), which was modeled after the Okinawan tonfa, the CHP’s top brass asked the opinion of Officer Ted Mason.

Ted was our fellow member at the San Diego County Martial Arts Alliance. He was one of Tang Soo Do Grandmaster Hwang Kee’s blackbelt, and he owned a dojang in Oceanside, California. Ted was also an avid Kendoka, and was often called as an expert witness in court trials, whenever an Asian hand held weapon was used in a crime.

During the Alliance’ monthly meeting, Ted Mason asked Narrie’s opinion about the CHP’s dilemma. In an impromptu demonstration, Narrie clearly proved that compared to the straight baton, the PR-24 is a poor substitute. Narrie even proved that

contrary to what they saw in Kung-fu movies, the straight stick was still superior to the nunchaku.

Ted recorded the demo with an old-fashioned Betamax video camera. The demo ended after Narrie disarmed a nunchaku attack. The nunchaku went flying and punctured the drywall of the dojo, where the meeting was held.

Ted Mason brought the videotape with him, and presented it to his superiors in Sacramento. According to Ted, the top brass were awed by Narrie's handling of the baton. However, they concluded that the Arnis techniques were too complicated for the future cadets to learn at police academies. Before long the CHP adopted the side-handled PR-24 in lieu of the straight baton.

Everyone in the Belleau Wood agreed that the baton techniques Narrie was teaching was far superior to that of the Koga method. Even the veteran MAAs would not dare try their baton skills against him. When asked, Narrie would casually explain that the techniques he was teaching had its roots in the Filipino martial arts. He would teach the use of a single baton to new personnel. The veteran MAA's could learn the simultaneous use of a baton and steel flashlight, which Narrie actually based on the Espada y daga techniques.

When dealing with drunken sailors or riots among the crewmembers and Marines, the MAA's and Shore Patrol do not depend on drawing a sidearm. The baton is their main tool in preserving the peace.

Within a year after changing his rate, Narrie was promoted as a Master-at-Arms Chief. While on shore duty for three years, Narrie attended various military schools that pertain to shipboard security and counter terrorism. The various instructors included former Navy Seals and Delta Force members.



Former World Middleweight Champion  
Ceferino Garcia showing Narrie the ropes

Sometime during the Eighties, I had the honor of interviewing the great Filipino boxer, Ceferino Garcia, for an article with a local paper. During his prime, Garcia was the World Middleweight boxing champion. He decided to spend his twilight years in San Diego. He was in his late eighties during my interview, and he was impeccably dressed in a suit. When he learned that Narrie is a Filipino martial arts instructor, Garcia removed his coat and the two of them worked on boxing techniques.

Needless to say, Narrie remains on record as the last man taught the wicked "bolo punch" by Ceferino Garcia. A few years after the interview, Ceferino peacefully passed away in his sleep.



When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, Narrie was not only the Chief Master-at-Arms, but also the Assistant Physical Security Officer of the USS Jouett. The USS Independence Battle Group was the first line of defense that President George Bush sent to intercept any oncoming threat from the Iraqi Air Force. The Jouett, which was positioned 200 miles ahead, was the main escort of the

Independence. If the Independence was the spear of the U.S. defense, then the Jouett was the tip of that spear. While the White House and the Pentagon were planning on how to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait, it was the Independence Battle Group that was guarding the Persian Gulf.

After a thorough demonstration of their abilities in handling shipboard security, the highest-ranking SEAL officer in the Persian Gulf endorsed that the Jouett Security team was capable of becoming a Boarding Party, whose purpose was to inspect any suspected vessel going to or coming from the port of Basra in Iraq. The Jouett's Boarding Party was fully trained by Narrie, who eventually received a letter of commendation from Rear Admiral Unruh, the highest-ranking Navy officer in the region.

In his quest to become the first Filipino martial artist to have used a balisong in modern warfare, Narrie asked the permission of the ship's Executive Officer to let him carry the knife. Being in a war zone, the XO agreed to look the other way. Narrie concealed the balisong inside his right combat boot. Months earlier, Narrie confiscated the balisong from an erring sailor, who was eventually dishonorably discharged. Narrie was about to dump the balisong into the ocean, when Saddam's troops invaded Kuwait.



Grandmaster Cacoy Canete and Narrie



MAA Chief Babao leading the Jouett's Boarding Party

In 1996, Grandmaster Cacoy conferred to Narrie the rank of 6th Grade Master of Doce Pares Eskrima. Then in October 25, 1997, Narrie was again promoted to the rank of 8th Grade Master.

Like the three sides of the triangle, the current Babao Arnis system is composed of three combative methods: the Villabrille-Largusa Kali, Grandmaster Cacoy's Doce Pares Eskrido, and the original Batangas Arnis taught by Turing Babao.

The practitioners are required to learn 36 different angles of attacks and basic defense.

They are also trained to instantly switch their mindset when dealing with sticks, with sharp blades, or barehanded techniques.



The entire curriculum is composed of 24 units. Having actually experienced fighting other martial arts instructors who used other Oriental weapons, Narrie incorporated fighting techniques against nunchakus, shinai or bo attackers.

Unlike some instructors who teach their students everything they know, Narrie always reminds his students that 20% of what he knows would not be taught, except to the chosen future successor.

In light of that, the system's curriculum is documented in the Babao Arnis Training Manuals. Composed of six volumes, it is not available to the general public but only to the Guros and advanced students. Guro' Dave Bertrand, a retired member of the San Diego Police SWAT Special Response Team, was instrumental in the development of the training manuals. It describes in detail the various forms and techniques. The grand design of the manuals is for the Guros to have a uniformed way of teaching the system.

Narrie refused to have the last six units included. This way, the Guros would readily have the 20% advantage over their own students.

Most of Narrie's students were already black belts in the other martial arts when they started their Arnis training. At present, some of the students are in law enforcement. Three of the students are Defensive Tactics instructors at the San Diego Regional Law Enforcement Training Academy. They are Chris Cross (Regional Academy coordinator), SDPD Sgt. Romeo de los Reyes, and SDSU Police trainer Marc Fox, who is also a 5th dan Blackbelt in Aikido.

There are also students who are police detectives, a DEA agent, and an Air Marshall, who Narrie prefers not to identify.

Some of Narrie's noted former students include Cliff Stewart, the former bodyguard of Mt. T, and Graciela Casillas, a female martial artist extraordinaire.



Narrie with Cliff Stewart,  
Mr. T's bodyguard



Narrie  
with Graciela Casillas

## **Weapons Sparring: A Test of Nerve and Skill**

By Zena Sultana Babao

*(This article about the First Weapons Sparring Tournament in the United States, with Grandmaster Narrie Babao as the First Champion. It was published in the Inside Kung-Fu magazine, November 1981 issue.)*

In combat, would a pair of nunchakos really be superior to a simple weapon, like the Bo or a pair of 27-inch rattan sticks? Believe it or not, the question has been explored twice in the San Diego area, and although the results are not conclusive, the answer would appear to be no.

On July 1, 1978m Kyokushinkai karate instructor Ben Singleton sponsored a Pro-Am Classic tournament in Vista, California. The featured weapons event was the weapons kumite (sparring), the first of its kind to be held anywhere in the United States. Although Kendo practitioners have their own annual tournaments, still they are just competing against themselves. The Filipinos, meanwhile, had to be contented with secret sparring matches since the last public competition was banned in Hawaii in 1948. After that final match in Hawaii which left Francisco Adorno an invalid for the rest of his life, Floro Villabrille remained as the only undefeated Kali Champion of Hawaii and the Philippines.

Singleton, who had been a sergeant in the U.S. Marines in the Vietnam War, observed that in Japan they did have weapons kumite every two years. The idea of bringing the event to the United States remained in his mind for a long time.

He had quit the Marine Corps and was a Deputy with the San Diego Sheriff's Office, Vista Division, when he announced in his tournament flyers in 1978 that a weapons sparring will be among the divisions contested. He met outright opposition from the local karate instructors who claimed that it was foolish and too risky to try. The opposition may have been right – nobody was foolish enough to sign up during the morning registration.

Narrie Babao, an Arnis and Kali instructor in San Diego, had promised to help Singleton officiate the event, but there were no entries. None of the ten senior weapons kata competitors dared try their luck in sparring. Singleton sounded the third and last call and was about ready to wrap up the event when Babao jokingly told him, "Wait a minute, if I sign up, then I can win the first place trophy by default, right?"

The disappointed Singleton agreed, but when Babao came back with the filled-out entry form, two more people were on their way to sign up. They were apparently waiting for someone to enter the competition first. Singleton's face lit up - his cherished dream will finally come true.

Guarding against possible liabilities, Singleton required that every contestant wear a body protector and steel-grilled head gear. The bouts were to last five minutes or to five points, whichever will come first. The only legal targets were the groin, the front and sides of the body, shoulders, hands, and the front, top and sides of the head. Solomon Kaihewalu, an instructor of Lua, a Hawaiian martial art, was assigned as referee.

The first match was between Babao, who used a pair of rattan sticks, and Joe Tedwill, a karate black belt from Los Angeles, California, who used the nunchakos. Like a wild tiger freed from its cage, Babao pursued Tedwill from one end of the ring to the other, leaving two broken pairs of nunchakos in his path. Tedwill was asked by the

referee to give up or to secure another weapon. Somebody handed him a Bo, but Tedwill was way behind in points when the match ended.

As soon as the body protectors were put on the next contestant, Eric Gorham, a Kung-Fu instructor from El Cajon, California, Babao was again asked to step inside the ring. This time it was rattan sticks against the shinai, a bamboo kendo sword. It was a close bout with neither one giving an inch as Gorham combined kendo and kung-fu techniques. They went into one-minute overtime rounds three times, and when Babao managed to land two successive points, the total length of the match went to eight minutes. In the end, Babao won.

With the first place trophy in the bag, Babao wearily handed his headgear to Tedwill, and sat by the side to watch the fight for the second place. Tidwell relied on the extra reach of the Bo to win. The result: Narrie Babao, first World Champion; Joe Tedwill, second place; and Eric Gorham, third place.

After the event, Singleton decided that the weapons sparring event be repeated every two years as in Japan. For his next tournament, Singleton moved the location to the Mira Costa College Gym in Oceanside, California. Once again the special feature was the weapons event, but defending champion Narrie Babao chose not to fight.

Five of his students at the Kali Academy of San Diego - Dan Cepeda, Fred Cepeda, Jojo Abueg, Bob George and Gary Fletcher - had asked for his blessings to have their skills tried in the ring. Babao made a deal that if none of them wins first place, then he would come back in the next tournament.

The kata events were in full swing when the Cepeda brothers arrived to sign up for the weapons sparring. When the black belts weapons kata ended, Singleton announced, "To see if your weapons form is really effective in fighting, prove it by joining the next event, the weapons kumite."

To make sure that the crowd will witness the once-ignored weapons sparring competition, Singleton changed the tournament schedule. Instead of being in the final division, the weapons kumite preceded the other kumite divisions.



**1978 First Weapons Sparring Winners:** Eric Gorham (runner-up), Narrie Babao (champion) and Joe Tedwill (third place). Notice Tedwill's broken nunchaku. Kneeling in front is host Ben Singleton.



In 1980 Weapons Sparring, Narrie Babao was the referee.

specified the changes. The hands are no longer legal targets. If disarmed, the unarmed contestant may still score with a punch or a kick. The armed contestants, however, can pursue his attacks until the referee sees the first point hit the target. From the original five minutes, each bout was shortened to two minutes, and the contestant who accumulated the most points win.

First to fight were Fred Cepeda and Jay Cabauatan from the Imperial Beach Eskrima School. Cabauatan was almost disqualified when two judges saw his stick land on Cepeda's spine. The other two judges scored it as a point, claiming it hit Cepeda's side. The referee over ruled both points and the illegal blow and the fight went on. When the two minutes were up, Cepeda was ahead by a couple of points.

The second match was between Kali Academy's Bob George and Tae Kwon Do black belt Leo Johnson. Earlier, Johnson won the weapons kata with a pair of nunchako, but during the weapons sparring he used only one. Using fast hit-and-run tactics, Johnson won with a score of 4-0.

Other matches followed, then the semi-finals and finals. All of the Filipino stylists used the twin rattan sticks called sinawali. Dan Cepeda of the Babao Kali Academy emerged as the 1980 champion. After the competition, Singleton said he wished that more people from other styles would try the weapons sparring instead of just joining the weapons kata.

Although both the 1978 and 1980 events didn't really prove that one weapon is more versatile and powerful than other weapons, it did prove one thing. When it comes to full contact weapons sparring, the Filipino stylists are hard to beat. Their way of training

Since none of the black belts who officiated or participated in 1978 were in attendance, Babao volunteered to referee. He introduced the use of a long staff to break up weapon-wielding competitors. This was due to the fact that, with the headgear on, it was difficult to hear the verbal commands of the referee.

During the meeting to define the rules, Singleton



**1980 winners:** Jojo Abueg (Forms Champion), Fred Cepeda (Weapons Sparring Runner-up), Jack Babao (Pee Wee Weapons Forms Champion), Dan Cepeda (Weapons Sparring Champion), and Mike Gomez (Novice Weapons Sparring Champion).

with weapons, and their belief that weapons ought to be taught before empty-hand techniques seems to give them an advantage in weapons sparring.

## **Training Top Gun's Security Force**

By Narrie Babao

On August 16, 1986, I became a permanent Chief Master-At-Arms in the United States Navy. Immediately, my Commanding Officer assigned me as Chief Master-At-Arms (CMAA) of the Fleet Anti-Submarine Squadron Training Center Pacific (FLEASWTRACENPAC) in San Diego. The job is similar to that of a small town Chief of Police.

My immediate supervisor, a Master Chief Master-at-Arms, became the command's Assistant Physical Security Officer. He delegated to me the responsibility of training our Base's Security Force, which was composed of sailors and Department of Defense (DOD) civilian personnel.

To update the training of our security force, I received orders to attend a three-week CRF (Crisis Response Force) Academy at the Miramar Naval Air Station. For those who have not seen the movie, the Miramar Air Station was the home of "Top Gun", where the U.S. Navy's fighter pilots learned the rudiments of aerial warfare. The lord of the skies at the time, were the F-14 Tom Cat jets.

That movie was loosely based on Top Gun's legendary figurehead, retired Navy Commander Randy "Duke" Cunningham. He was the Navy's first "Ace" pilot during the Vietnam conflict. A pilot becomes an Ace, after five confirmed kills of the enemy's planes. After his retirement from the Navy, Cunningham was elected to Congress. Unfortunately, he is now serving time in a federal penitentiary, after being judged guilty of accepting bribes from special interest groups. A few years ago, the air station was turned over from being a Naval Air Station to that of a Marine Corps Air Station.

The tarmac, and some sensitive areas of the air station, falls strictly under exclusive Federal jurisdiction. Any critical incident that happens within these areas has to be handled by the military and the federal agencies concerned. Under the current memorandum of agreement, the San Diego Police can only assist on the exterior parts of the perimeter.

During the early 80's, the only functional FBI SWAT team was stationed in Washington, D.C., but could be flown anywhere in the United States. The fastest estimated time of responding to the scene, from Washington to San Diego, was around two hours. That would be considered a remarkable stretch of time should a critical incident happen in the restricted areas.

Critical incidents could include bomb threats, bomb explosions, sabotage, and hostage taking situations. It was based on this reasoning that the Miramar Top Gun CRF elite unit was created. The unit was composed of highly trained, superbly fit, and highly motivated sailors. Their daily job was to keep improving their training in these areas, and to help train other commands in the San Diego area. Their function is the same as that of a SWAT team in any law enforcement agency.



The man charged with forming the elite team was James King, a Vietnam veteran Green Beret sergeant, who converted to a Senior Chief Master-at-Arms rating in the U.S. Navy. He was also the head honcho of the three-week long academy, which is no different than that of a police SWAT academy.

The first day of training consisted mostly of endless push-ups, going through the obstacle course, and running in troop formation, for about eight miles. Only half of the original enrollees remained during the start of Day Two. It did not matter whether one is a commissioned officer, a Chief Petty Officer, or a senior Petty Officer. Every trainee gets the same treatment from the training staff. When not inside the classroom at the Air Station, most of the physical training was held at nearby Camp Elliot.



Chief Babao poses in front of the Duffy Town local bank

Within Camp Elliot is a mock village, fondly called "Duffy Town". Named after the Sheriff who initiated its construction, the facility was built to train the SDSO (San Diego Sheriff's Office) Emergency Response Team. The other law enforcement agencies later shared in the use of the facility, and that included NAS Miramar's CRF team.

Besides the obstacle course, the shooting range, and a high tower, which was used for scaling and rappelling, Duffy Town is composed of several buildings that resembled a bank, business offices, and residences.

Every training day starts with a five mile run in troop formation. When weak runners started to lag behind, the troop formation would make a u-turn to go back and have the stragglers rejoin the formation.

The classroom and hands on training included subjects such as securing a compromised building, hostage negotiations, identifying potential threats, dynamic room entry, marksmanship with various types of firearms, first aid, dignitary protection (body guarding), hand and verbal communications, emergency vehicle operations, and hand to hand defensive tactics.



Narrie with guest instructor, a Delta Force trainer. Behind them is the ambulance called to Duffy Town after one trainee was injured



Guest instructor observing the elite Top Gun CRF Team, the team advances for a dynamic entry drill, the team confronting the "suspects"

The Top Gun Security's hand to hand defensive tactics were based on karate, Judo, and Aikido police techniques as taught to them by Ernie Blunk, a certified DOD police trainer. Their baton techniques were straight out of the Koga method, which was adapted by the CHP (California Highway Patrol) and the LAPD.

The first time the Top Gun Security members saw Filipino martial arts techniques, was when they asked me to show how it is done. Immediately they were impressed, because the Filipino martial arts techniques answered the questions that the other martial arts left unexplained.



Chief Babao teaching techniques to the elite Top Gun CRF Security Team

The CRF team became so interested, that after my graduation from the academy, Senior Chief King asked me several times for temporary duty at NAS Miramar Security just so I could teach them some Filipino martial arts techniques.

At the time, the metal expandable batons were not yet authorized for military use. Most of the CRF members preferred the light rattan sticks to the heavy batons issued for the Navy. They were quick to adapt the Filipino knife fighting techniques using their issued K-bar knives.

Even though the Miramar Air Station is very strict in their access to the base, thousands of civilian guests would throng to the tarmac area to attend the Blue Angels Air Show. This usually happens on the second weekend of October, when the U.S. Navy celebrates its birthday. All Blue Angels pilots are graduates of Top Gun.



Chief Babao, on the left, guarding the SR-71 Spy plane

Military planes, from vintage era to the latest spy plane are on static display. The sky show is continuous, showing the various Navy planes involved in various conflicts. The highlight of the day would be the precision aerial maneuver demonstration of the world famous Blue Angels team.

A lot of effort is contributed by the Security personnel to ensure a safe and pleasant show. They made sure that the sensitive buildings remained secured, and that the static displays are protected from sabotage and vandalism.

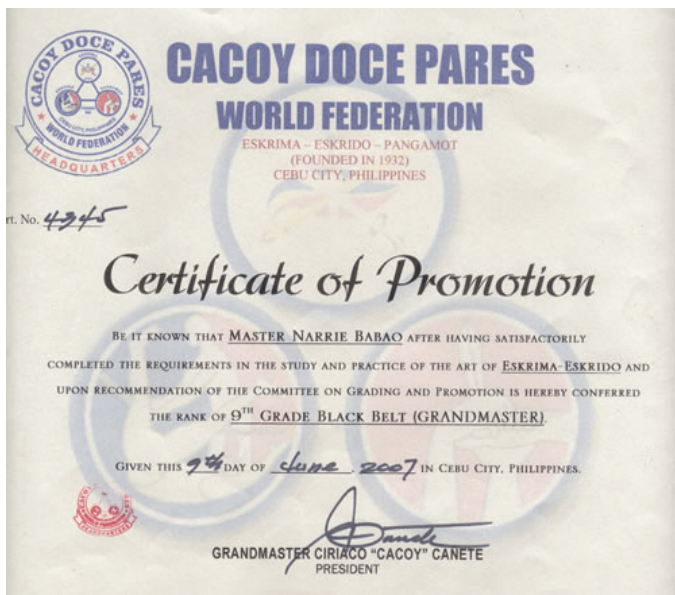
Unbeknownst to the multitude of guests, CRF sharpshooters and spotters were routinely stationed on the roof tops of tall buildings, where they have a bird's eye view of the crowd. Any potential problem from the crowd can be relayed to the ground units, who use golf carts to quickly traverse the wide and

long tarmac. Dozens of Naval security forces from other commands are usually called upon to augment the Miramar force.

After James King retired, political pressure from high ranking Navy officers forced the Miramar's Commanding Officer to disband the SWAT type CRF team. At that time, I was transferred to the USS Jouett (CG-29). My SWAT training at Miramar helped me develop the ship's Boarding Party during the Persian Gulf conflict against Iraq.

I selected the Miramar Security Department for my twilight tour in the Navy. I worked with Ernie Blunk in teaching Defensive Tactics to the Security personnel. A few years after I retired, Naval Air Station Miramar was converted as a U.S. Marine Corps Air Station.

At present, my two most treasured certificates include my promotion to Grandmaster from Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete, and a certificate of appreciation from the 41st President and Commander-In-Chief George Bush.



Narrie's Grandmaster certificate from Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete



Certificate of Appreciation from George Bush (Senior)



## Babao Arnis and the Expandable Baton

### A Winning Combination for Law Enforcement

By David A. Bertrand



The task force of law enforcement officers and detectives approached the front of the apartment with weapons drawn. Several members of the team split off and made their way through an alley to cover the rear of the unit. When everyone was in place, a detective stepped forward, pounded on the front door, and shouted, “Police officers with a search warrant demanding entry!”

The suspect inside the apartment knew that he was wanted for violating the conditions of his parole. Rather than complying with the demands of the law enforcement officers, however, he ran to the bathroom and started flushing his methamphetamine stash down the toilet.

Realizing that the suspect was not complying with their demands, two members of the team stepped forward and forced open the front door with a battering ram. Within seconds, the task force was moving through the apartment and clearing each

room in a systematic manner.

“*Let’s see your hands,*” shouted several of the officers as the parolee stepped out of the bathroom and into the hallway. Instead of following their orders, however, he stepped towards the officers, clenched his fists, and cocked his right arm back. The officer closest to the suspect stepped back, re-holstered his sidearm, and reached for an expandable baton. As the suspect unleashed a powerful right cross, the officer blocked the punch with his baton and followed-up with a strike to the parolee’s midsection. The suspect’s legs buckled as he dropped to the ground in pain. He was handcuffed and taken into custody without further incident.

“*Years ago, that scenario might have ended differently,*” said Master Narrie Babao. “The officers and detectives had less training and fewer tools to get the job done. There was a time when the parolee in that scenario might have landed that punch. The situation could have gone downhill fast.” Babao speaks from experience. He has been involved in military and civilian law enforcement training for over two decades and currently holds an 8th Degree Black Belt in the Filipino Martial Art of Eskrima.

“The Task Force mentioned in the scenario is made up of law enforcement officers and detectives from several federal, state, and local agencies,” explained Babao. “They are referred to as the J.U.D.G.E. Unit. The acronym stands for Jurisdictions Unified for Drug and Gang Enforcement. Their primary job is to crack down on drug dealing and gang-related crimes committed by violent offenders who don’t comply with the conditions of their probation or parole. It is very dangerous work.”

*“One of the detectives on the task force asked me if I would be interested in teaching the unit some advanced expandable baton techniques that fit their specialized needs,” said Babao. “The expandable baton is a unique law enforcement impact weapon. It has several hollow steel sections that can be collapsed into the larger-diameter handle section. This makes it easier for patrol officers, undercover detectives, and entry team personnel to carry it on their belts or tactical gear. A quick flick of the wrist and the baton snaps out to its full length.”*

*“I had helped the Regional Law Enforcement Academy’s training staff develop an expandable baton program in 1994 when they were evaluating that type of baton as a possible replacement for the side handled baton,” explained Babao. “Shaun Donelson and Tom Snowden, two of the defensive tactics instructors involved in the evaluation process, had heard that I was a Filipino martial arts instructor. They approached me for training and advice. The Arnis that I had learned from my father heavily influenced the expandable baton curriculum that developed from this initial pilot program. Naturally, the techniques had to be modified slightly in order to conform to department policies concerning the use of force.”*

Assisting in the development of a training program involving the use of a baton was nothing new for Babao. *“Some of the techniques we evaluated were from my years as a Chief Master at Arms in the U.S. Navy,” added Babao. “I had been teaching riot control tactics and baton drills to the Navy’s law enforcement personnel since 1982. When I retired from the Navy in 1992, I started my second career as a Community Service Officer with the San Diego Police Department. After assisting with the initial expandable baton program, I became more involved with the department’s defensive tactics program and their annual in-service training.”*

*“In 1999 Romeo De Los Reyes was selected as a defensive tactics instructor at the regional academy,” continued Babao. “He was studying Arnis with me at the time. De Los Reyes was instrumental in introducing even more of my Filipino martial art concepts into the San Diego Police Department’s defensive tactics program.”*



Members of the J.U.D.G.E. Unit review the expandable baton techniques that they learned from Master Narrie Babao.



J.U.D.G.E. Unit (Jurisdictions Unified for Drug and Gang Enforcement. Their primary job is to crack down on drug dealing and gang-related crimes committed by violent offenders who don’t comply with the conditions of their probation or parole.





Several of Master Babao's students are defensive tactics instructors or members of specialized teams, like J.U.D.G.E. Unit and SWAT. Clockwise – Deputy Chris Cross, Sgt Romeo De Los Reyes, and Detective Liza Prodigalidad.

*“Master Babao and I tried to refine the initial expandable baton program that he had helped develop a few years earlier,” said De Los Reyes. “More specifically, we emphasized combination strikes and off-line (triangular) footwork to allow the officers to move to a position of advantage, instead of fighting the suspect toe-to-toe. We also emphasized maintaining distance from the suspect to take advantage of the range of the weapon.”*

Within a few years, word of Babao's expertise with the expandable baton had spread throughout the local law enforcement community. S.W.A.T. Team members and officers assigned to teams that frequently made dynamic entries approached him for specialized training in the use of their batons. The J.U.D.G.E. Unit mentioned at the

beginning of this article was one such team. *“We really liked training in the use of the expandable baton with Master Babao,”* said one J.U.D.G.E. Unit member. *“We needed techniques that would work in close quarters, like a bedroom or hallway.”*

Perhaps one of the primary reasons for Master Babao's success in the development of an expandable baton program is the effectiveness of his techniques. *“I think that some of the officers and detectives were tired of trying to learn the complicated and ineffective defensive tactics skills that have been around the law enforcement community for so many years,”* says Babao. *“The Filipino martial arts have always been based on the realities of combat. The early masters of Kali and Arnis developed the art for life or death fights with knives, sticks, and bare hands. They didn't have time to waste on ineffective, flashy moves. If a fighter practiced strikes or blocks that did not work in a real fight, their useless techniques usually died with them in combat.”*

Master Babao's system of Arnis can be traced back to the fierce fighters from the Province of Batangas in the northern region of the Philippines. The art is based on 12 angles of attack and a combination of blocks, checks, and counters that follow the same 12 angles. *“When I'm teaching law enforcement officers, I usually just show them the first six angles of attack,”* admits Babao. *“They get a little overloaded if I cover too much material in a short period of time. Most of the attacks that officers experience in the street can be handled with these first six angles.”*

In addition to its reality-based effectiveness, Master Babao's system is also well received by law enforcement officers for another reason. The hand-to-hand skills that he teaches follow the same basic patterns as the baton skills. *“Our empty hand techniques are based on the same muscle memories as our stick fighting,”* explains Babao. *“The early masters knew the importance of keeping things simple. By practicing one skill, you are practicing the other skill as well.”*

This simplified approach to defensive tactics training was greatly appreciated by the members of the J.U.D.G.E. Unit, as well as, other officers and trainers. *“I liked*

Master Babao's approach to the expandable baton and empty hand training due to its practicality, simplicity, and commonality among techniques," said Deputy Chris Cross. Cross is in charge of the defensive tactics program at the San Diego Regional Law Enforcement Academy. He has trained in a variety of martial arts, and like many officers who have been exposed to Master Babao's training, approached him for private lessons in the traditional Filipino Martial Arts.



Detective Liza Prodigalidad demonstrates one of the expandable baton techniques that she learned from her partner, Master Narrie Babao. When Master Babao throws a right hook punch to the left side of her head, Prodigalidad utilizes off-line (triangular) footwork to decrease the force of the blow, and blocks it with her baton. She then checks his forearm with her left hand. Prodigalidad immediately counters with a baton strike to Master Babao's midsection.



Sergeant Romeo De Los Reyes demonstrates the same technique performed without the expandable baton. When Deputy Chris Cross throws a right hook punch to the left side of his head, De Los Reyes utilizes off-line (triangular) footwork to decrease the force of the blow, and blocks it empty handed. He then checks Cross forearm with his left hand. De Los Reyes immediately counters with a knife hand strike to Cross midsection.

*"Like most Filipino Masters, I only teach family members and close friends," says Babao. "In the last few years, however, it seems like half of my students are from law enforcement. Detective Liza Prodigalidad, a senior member of the J.U.D.G.E. Unit, takes private lessons. Sergeant Romeo De Los Reyes, Deputy Chris Cross, and Officer Marc Fox are all defensive tactics instructors. They take evening classes. Sergeant De Los Reyes is also a S.W.A.T. Sergeant and a member of the department's Use of Force Committee."*

The Babao Arnis School in San Diego is Master Babao's main headquarters. In addition to Babao Arnis, the curriculum of the school includes Grandmaster Cacoy Canete's Eskrido, Villabrille-Largusa Kali, Doce Pares Eskrima, and a variety of empty hand arts such as Kuntao ("Fist-Way") and Panuntukan (Philippine boxing). *"I teach each art as a separate entity at a specific level in the curriculum," says Babao. "I don't just blend everything together and call it my art. I show respect for each of the masters*

*that I have received instruction from and try to preserve their art in its original form for future generations.”*

With his second career in full swing, Master Babao has no plans for slowing down anytime soon. *“I want to continue teaching within the law enforcement community,”* adds Babao. *“They need the skills for real world confrontations. I recently became involved in a defensive tactics program that Marc Fox coordinates with the U.S. Navy’s Master-at-Arms School at the 32nd Street Naval Station. I also want to share my traditional Filipino martial arts with other martial artists. One of my students and I will be completing a series of instructor training manuals on Babao Arnis in the next few months. I also have several seminars scheduled for this year.”*

Wherever the future may bring him, the law enforcement community in and around San Diego will always be grateful for the training and advice they have received from Master Narrie Babao. Officers, detectives, S.W.A.T. Team members, and entry team personnel assigned to specialized task forces like the J.U.D.G.E. Unit, now have a simple and effective expandable baton system.



In a day and age where the law enforcement instructors, as well as, many martial artists seem to have rediscovered “reality based training,” Master Narrie Babao is once again filling the need for practical and effective skills. *“The early masters perfected their skills and made their arts reality based centuries ago”* says Babao. *“There is no need to reinvent the wheel. My biggest challenge is to modify the techniques slightly to make them less deadly so that they conform to department policies. The original Filipino martial artists didn’t have to worry about excessive force complaints or attorneys.”*

**About The Author:** David Bertrand is a retired S.W.A.T. Officer and former U.S.M.C. Platoon Commander. He has over thirty years of martial arts experience and has earned black belts in a variety of traditional Japanese systems, as well as, the Filipino martial art of Eskrido.

# **The Daga in the Babao Arnis System**

By Zena Sultana Babao

## **The Daga - Integral Part of History**

The daga (slang for dagger) has always played an integral part in the history of the Philippine Martial Arts, and is considered an invaluable weapon not only in the traditional fighting systems but also in the mixed martial arts. Daga is popular almost worldwide.



## **California Penal Code 12020**

In the wrong hands, however, the dagger could be an instrument of death. That's probably the reason why here in the State of California, there's a law about dagger possession. Under Penal Code 12020, possession of a dagger in public is a felony. It is in the same category as possession of a switch blade, push-button knife, or any gravity-opening knife such as the balisong (butterfly knife). It is illegal to conceal any kind of knife on a person's body. To legally carry a knife, it has to be displayed inside a knife case, or the clip of the knife should be visible when carried in the shirt or pants pocket.

## **Our FMA System**

At present, under the Babao Arnis system, we teach three separate systems: the Batangas Baston, the Villabrille-Largusa Kali, and the Cacoy Doce Pares Eskrido and Pangamot. Additionally, we teach Kuntao (empty hands), Sikaran (kicking arts) and some Panuntukan (Filipino boxing).

Babao Arnis was named after the late Buenaventura "Turing" Babao, the late father and original Arnis teacher of my husband (Grandmaster Narrie Babao). Master Turing learned the Batangas Baston system of Arnis from Ka Juan, who once rode with General Miguel Malvar, the last Filipino general to surrender to the Americans in 1912.

## **Techniques and Applications**

Our system (Babao Arnis) teaches the use of the daga in combat fighting and in forms called sayaws (Tagalog) or sinulogs (Cebuano). Although shorter in length, the daga is as lethal, or probably more so, as the bastons or Olisis (rattan sticks). The sticks



can maim, disable and render helpless an opponent, but the daga can inflict severe injury and can even kill instantly.



In Doce Pares, Espada y Daga is referred to as Olisi-Baraw.  
Guro Narrison defends against Olisi-Baraw attacks

The techniques and applications are the same, but with a slight adjustment with the twist of the wrist. When an Eskrimador is armed with both the stick and the dagger, the daga is usually held in the “alive” hand and serves as a secondary weapon. As such, the lethal daga compensates for its shorter length - probably the same principle as in the Chinese yin-yang.

Here are some photos of techniques, moves and applications of the daga in the Babao Arnis system, as well as a few from Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete’s Doce Pares Eskrido.

### **Introducing: Guros Narrison and Jack**

Allow me to introduce to you two of my three sons: Narrison and Jack, both Guros (instructors) in our martial arts system. My youngest son, Kris (named after the zigzag-edged sword), is also a practitioner, but not yet a Guro. Kris is the godson of world-famous martial artist Dan Inosanto.



Fun games with Espada y Daga.



Guros Narrison and Jack Babao

At a very young age, both Narrison and Jack showed a keen interest in our martial arts system. At first they considered the sticks and



wooden daga's as play things, "fun games" as they tried to imitate what their dad and our students were doing. At that time, Narrison was only two years old and Jack just a year old.

### **Guro Jack Babao**

Although Jack is younger, he started training ahead of Narrison. He joined the class at age five and became such an ardent student that he easily learned most of the sayaws being taught in our class. A year later, he performed his first demo appearance at Balboa Park here in San Diego during the Philippine Independence Day celebration sponsored by the House of Pacific Relations.



Jack's first demo, at age six,  
at Balboa Park San Diego, CA.

When Jack started competing in tournaments, he won trophy after trophy, and some of his trophies were much bigger than he was at that time. In 1983, he won the Pee Wee Weapons Forms Grand Championship at the Ed Parker International Karate Tournament. Jack's tournament-winning form was the sinawali/double balisong combination. Other competitors performed Karate and Kung-fu weapons forms.



Zena, Narrison and Narrie with Ed Parker - 1974



Jack at age 10, with his collection of trophies



In 1983, Jack Babao won the Pee Wee Weapons Forms at Ed Parker's Internationals in Long Beach. It was the first time the Balisongs were used at the finals of the Internationals.

I featured Jack and my husband in two separate segments on the TV program “Spectrum” on KGTV-10 here in San Diego after being requested by the program’s host, Fred Norfleet, to find martial artists for the show. This was back in the 80’s. On air, Jack and his dad performed Arnis techniques and sayaws, after the interview with Norfleet.

Jack said that he initially started training because he was fascinated by the “click-clack” sound of the sticks, and seeing stick fighting being done almost every day in our class. He realized when he was a little bit older that his real reason was “to follow my dad’s footsteps.”

He is versatile in the use of both sticks and bladed weapons, especially the balisong. His favorite sayaws or forms in the Babao Arnis system are: sinawali (double sticks), palitan (single stick), kinamutay (bare hand), unang sayaw (basic form), bangkaw (spear), and of course, the double balisong. After he learned Eskrido, Jack became very proficient with sinulogs 3, 5 and 7.



Guro Jack Babao first learned the Balisong when he was six years old. In 1983, he was the Pee Wee Weapons Form Champion at Ed Parker's Internationals in Long Beach, CA. It was the first time that double Balisongs were seen at the finals of Ed Parker's Internationals.



Jack was only fourteen when he was certified as an Arnis Guro

Grandmaster Cacoy’s Doce Pares Eskrido.

Career-wise, Jack is the Retail Manager of the Mission Valley “Best Buy” store. He also held the same position when he was assigned to the Chula Vista, El Cajon, and Mira Mesa stores. He worked with Best Buy ever since the company opened its first store in San Diego. Now that he is in a management position, he is oftentimes assigned to train new employees of the company, not only here in California but even as far away as Hawaii.

He credits his upward mobility to his martial arts training, and the discipline that he learned from it. He said that both the mental and physical aspects of his martial arts

Jack distinguished himself as the youngest practitioner ever promoted as an instructor in Babao Arnis. He was only 14! During the test for promotion, Jack had to spar with adults, since we didn’t have other students below 18 years old. Jack’s promotion to Guro was witnessed by, among others: Graciela Casillas, former women’s kickboxing champion, and Cliff Stewart, former bodyguard of Mr. “T”. Both Graciela and Cliff took some lessons in Babao Arnis.

Right now, Jack is a 3rd Degree Black Belt in our system. He dreams that someday he could also be an instructor in

training has helped him a lot, and still does, with decision- making skills and the ability to deal with people.

### **Guro Jack Babao Demonstrates the Babao Arnis Daga Angle of Attack**



Angle #1



Angle #1 attack is aimed at opponent's left carotid or side of face.



Angle #2



Angle #2 attack is a thrust aimed below the opponent's right rib cage.



Angle #3



Angle #3 is aimed at opponent's right carotid or side of face.



Angle #4



Angle #4 is a thrust aimed below opponent's left rib cage.



Angle #5



Angle #5 aim is to slice opponent's nose vertically downward.



Angle #6



Angle #6 is a thrust to opponent's midsection or chest.



### Guro Jack Babao Demonstrates the Counters against Attack Angle #1



Guro Jack demonstrates Babao Arnis counters against Attack #1



Block attack by slashing opponent's weapon wrist.



Live hand checks opponent's weapon hand.



Counter to opponent's right carotid.



Secondary counter to opponent's left carotid.



Complete with thrust to eyes or face.

### Guro Narrison Babao

Narrison (Nar for short) started formal training when he turned 16, which was much later than his younger brother. But immediately after he started training, he did it with gusto! He learned not only our martial arts system, but also the Villabrille-Largusa system of Kali, as well as Cacoy's Doce Pares Eskrido. He is a third-degree black belt in Babao Arnis and a fourth-degree black belt in Eskrido. He is an instructor in both systems.

Nar is so much into martial arts that he attends all kinds of Filipino martial arts tournaments, seminars and martial arts related events. He attended this year's 3-day "Grandmaster Cacoy's Doce Pares World Gathering" in Cebu City, Philippines, which was participated in by over one hundred Filipino martial arts practitioners from around the world. A banquet was also held the second night of the event to honor Grandmaster Cacoy's first Hall of Fame inductees. Nar is always present whenever the Supreme Grandmaster conducts seminars and trainings here in southern California.

Despite Nar's physical handicap, walking with a limp since one leg is shorter than the other due to polio, he participates and wins in full-contact weapons sparring



Narrison with his mom, Zena In front of the old Filipino Kali Academy in Torrance, CA.

tournaments using sticks and bladed weapons. Nar, who is left-handed, is ambidextrous and can wield the single and double sticks with swiftness and strength. He said that he compensates with his hands what he cannot do with his legs.

His favorite forms are espada y daga (stick and dagger) in the Babao Arnis style, and sinulogs 6 and 7 in Doce Pares Eskrido. Among his favorite techniques in both arts are “locks”, “traps” and “compression.”

He said that he looks up to both Grandmaster Cacoy Canete and Guro Dan Inosanto as living legends in the martial arts world. Nar says that he dreams that someday he, too, would be doing seminars all over the world just like Grandmaster Cacoy and Dan. Another dream of his is to someday open his martial arts studio.

Nar used to teach a private class in Joe Abueg’s Cepeda-Abueg Martial Arts studio in El Cajon, but when it closed, and Joe Abueg moved his class to his garage, Nar also moved his small class to our garage. Guro Joe Abueg, is one of the first set of guros promoted by our school.

Nar said that he looks up to Guro Joe and appreciates Joe Abueg for his dedication to the Babao Arnis system by helping propagate it for more than twenty years. Nar also thanks Joe for encouraging him and telling my son that he “can move faster with one weaker leg than some people who are blessed with two good legs.”

Nar is happy to have inspired one of the students of Guro Mario Gajo to train in the Philippine martial arts. Guro Mario, another graduate of the Babao Arnis system, has told Nar that his (Guro Mario’s) student also has a physical handicap and considers my son as his role model.

Narrison believes that there should be brotherhood and respect between Filipino martial artists, and he hopes that conflict and hostility could be avoided. He said that every Filipino martial arts system is important, so he takes pains to try to attend other system’s seminars to help understand their art, and to promote greater cooperation and camaraderie within the Filipino martial arts world.

### **Guro Narrison Demonstrates Eskrido Daga**



Eskrido Daga #1 attack



Eskrido #1 attack to top of head or forehead.



Eskrido Daga #2 attack



Eskrido #2 attack to right temple or carotid.



Eskrido Daga #3 attack



Eskrido #3 attack to left temple or carotid.



Eskrido Daga #4 attack



Eskrido #4 attack to below right rib cage.



Eskrido Daga #5 attack



Eskrido #5 attack to below left rib cage.



Eskrido Daga #6 attack



Eskrido #6 attack reverse slash to midsection.

### **Guro Narrison Demonstrates Eskrido Counters Against Attack #1**



Block and check.



Counter to opponent's throat.



Continue checking opponent's weapon hand.



Final Counter to opponent's chest.

As William Arthur Ward wrote; *“When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves”*.

An M.B.A. graduate from SDSU (San Diego State University), Narrison currently works with the County of San Diego’s Human Services Department. He is a human services specialist, and his job is to evaluate clients so they can get public assistance and medical benefits.



Guros Narrison and Jack demonstrate the Daga Sumbrada (shadow) drill. It is a give and take drill, which continually looks for an opening on the opponent's defense.



Guros Narrison and Guro Jack demonstrate Daga Baliktad (Reverse) grips.



On guard position for a daga sumbrada (shadow) drill.



Guro Narrison attempts a backhand slash to the neck. Guro Jack blocks the attack with his left hand.



Guro Jack counters with an overhead slash to the neck, which Guro Narrison parries with his left hand. Guro Narrison then counters with a thrust to the abdomen.



Guro Jack obliquely steps to the right, and blocks the thrust with his left hand, followed by a check with the knife.



Guro Jack counters with a back-hand horizontal slash to the abdomen, which Guro Narrison stops with a gunting grip.



Guro Narrison delivers a back-handed slash to the neck. Guro Jack blocks the slash with his left hand, then augments the block with a daga check.



Guro Jack re-counters with a thrust to the throat. Guro Narrison steps obliquely forward to the right and blocks the thrust with his left hand. Then Guro Narrison counters the attack with a reverse thrust to the chest.



Guro Jack stops the thrust with his left hand, then drops his daga hand hard to check Guro Narrison's knife hand.



When the designated time limit runs out, both players salute each other.

## **CEBU: The Mecca of the Filipino Art of Stick Fighting**

By Narrison Babao

I was born in Naga City, Philippines, and I left my home country when I was almost two years old. I have visited the Philippines only twice in my life. The first time was in November 2005 to attend the wedding of Giovanni Sagun, a good friend of mine. During this trip I had the chance to visit and meet my Mom's side of the family - uncles, aunties and cousins - in Manila. And I took the opportunity to visit and enjoy the surrounding places around Manila, like Pangasinan, Banaue Rice Terraces, Baguio and the Hundred Islands.

My second trip to the Philippines was in March 2008 to attend the 3-day International Martial Arts seminar and CDPEWF Hall of Fame event in Cebu City. The event was the first of its kind to honor those who made contributions and impact to the Filipino Martial Arts community. There were over a hundred participants who attended from different countries: United States, Australia, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand and the Philippines.

Because my parents' school, the Babao Arnis, is part of the Cacoy Doce Pares family, I felt I needed to represent our school since my parents could not make it. My other reason for going was to accept an award on behalf of my father, Grandmaster Narrie Babao, for his "Exemplary Dedication to Doce Pares." The date for the award/ceremony for the Hall of Fame, March 8, coincided with my birthday. So the whole trip was more like a birthday present for me. What is so memorable on this trip is that I actually trained at the Cacoy Doce Pares World Headquarters in Cebu City, even for just a day.



Going back to my home country by myself and not knowing how to speak the native language (Tagalog) was a little bit inconvenient, but since I am surrounded by friends from the United States and from other countries, they made me feel at ease. The Cacoy Doce Pares practitioners from around the world are like an extended family.

I was excited and eager to visit Cebu and meet old and new friends I talked to online, like Grandmaster Vince Palumbo from Australia, Tobias Ricker from Germany and Masters Dennis and Chuck Canete from the Philippines. However, I felt a little bit nervous. I was lucky that a few of my colleagues were on the same flight to Cebu as me: Grandmaster Richard Bustillo and some of his students from IMB Academy, and also Master Angel Postigo from Mexico. Albert Mendoza and his family, also friends of mine, visited Cebu from San Diego for a different reason, and I got to hang out with them on my last day in Cebu.







Landing in Cebu brought back memories of my first trip to the Philippines because when I landed in Manila at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, there was a welcoming party of my friends displaying a sign with my name on it.

In Manila, Master Dennis Canete was there to welcome Grandmaster Richard Bustillo and his students. In Cebu, I stayed at the Parklane Hotel, and I highly

recommend it to visitors visiting Cebu for the very first time. Prior to my trip, I made plans to share a room with one of Grandmaster Vince Palumbo students to save on cost for the duration of my stay. What happened is I got to be a roommate of Grandmaster Vince Palumbo for the first night. However, after that first night Grandmaster Vince decided to trade places with one his students because I am a really loud snorer. The next day, Grandmaster Vince nicknamed me “Harley” because he said my snoring is louder than a Harley-Davidson.

My first day in Cebu was March 6, and that morning was the first time I got to train at the Cacoy Doce Pares Headquarters. Later that day, the local media and television stations did a group panel interview with Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy and other Masters from different countries.



Master Narrison Babao and Grandmaster Vince Palumbo



Touring Cebu

On my second day in Cebu, we had a bus tour around town with Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete himself as tour guide. We visited the Mayor of Cebu, the Basilica del Santo Nino, San Pedro Fort, the LapuLapu Shrine, and the beach in Mactan Island where LapuLapu defeated Magellan.

For the next 3-days we attended a mixed martial arts seminar at the Cebu City Sports Complex. The featured instructors were Grandmaster Richard Bustillo and Grandmaster Anthony Kleeman from the United States, and

Grandmaster Vince Palumbo from Australia. These three Grandmasters took turns teaching part of their respective systems: Grandmaster Bustillo taught Jet Kune Do, Grandmaster Kleeman taught kickboxing, and Grandmaster Vince Palumbo also taught boxing and his version of Pangamot and Arjukenbo.

I got a chance to train, make new friends, and learn new techniques and concepts that I can add to my own. This whole 4-day event was summed up in an article entitled “Gathering 2008” by Nicole Miller.

This was such an eventful trip for me, and made me remember that when I was a kid I used to watch the old BBC documentary “Way of the Warrior Eskrima” showing Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete teaching Doce Pares Eskrido/Eskrima. And of course, I also saw the pictures my father brought



home after his own visit to Cebu.

In a conversation with Master Albert Mendoza, I related the importance of visiting Cebu, which are: for training and to further my knowledge of the Cacoy Doce Pares System of Martial Arts at the very site where it all originated from. If the Grandmaster of the system I am studying lives locally, then there is no need to travel a great distance. A worldwide system such as Cacoy Doce Pares, if one can save up and

make a commitment to travel outside their comfort zone shows true dedication and loyalty to their art.

On his part, Master Albert goes to Cebu annually to further his training in San Miguel Eskrima, the martial arts system of Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy's elder brother, Filemon “Momoy” Canete.

Grandmaster Vince Palumbo sums it best! He said that the importance of visiting Cebu and the World Headquarters is to keep a close link with the Canete family. He said that we must encourage the instructors to take their students to the 'MECCA' of Filipino Stickfighting to gain new and updated skills from the top instructors at the Cacoy Doce Pares Eskrima Headquarters. If we don't do that, he said, the art will die very rapidly.

I am looking forward to making more trips to the Philippines, not just to Cebu to train, but also to other parts of the Philippines to meet relatives from both sides of my family. As a lifetime student and now a Master under the Cacoy Doce Pares system, I personally believe one should not only attend local seminars hosted for the Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete but should also attend, if possible, the major events and tournaments, and visit the CDPEWF HQ in 81A C Padilla St in Cebu City, the Mecca





of the Filipino Art of Stickfighting.

## **Babao Arnis Bloodline**

By: Zena Sultana Babao



Love and respect account for a son following the footsteps of his father. But when that tradition of legacy spans four generations that is carrying the love and respect to a higher level.

The handing down of the art of Babao Arnis is now in its fourth generation: from Turing Babao to my husband, Master Narrie Babao, and from our son Jack Babao to our grandson, Jayson Babao.

Jayson started twirling a rattan stick when he was just a year old. At that early age he already had his own Kali uniform. It's the same uniform that Jayson's daddy wore many years earlier.

Jayson is the only child now enrolled at the Babao Arnis Academy where students have to be 18 years old and above. The only minors allowed to enroll by Narrie, affectionately called "Big Dad" by Jayson, are children of Guros and advanced students.

Every student at our school had to undergo a strict screening process before acceptance. Since many of the students are from various law enforcement agencies, it would be next to impossible for non-law abiding parties to get in.

If a minor-age student has to be accepted, the application has to be signed by a parent or grandparent. For formality sake, I signed Jayson's application.

Our Academy's curriculum of instruction is strictly followed. Each student has a lesson plan, and upon completion of a lesson, Narrie has to check off and initial it. There is no special treatment for close relatives, or nepotism when it comes to promotions. Jayson's daddy, and his uncle Narrison, are both Guros at the Academy.

Jayson has competed and won Arnis tournaments, and performed at various martial arts demonstrations. The Babao Arnis Academy is usually invited to do a demo at various Filipino-American community events.

Jayson's dad, Jack Babao, was a perennial champion in Weapons Forms in martial arts tournaments. Jack was only nine when he won the Junior Weapons Forms



One year old Jayson with big dad Master Narrie Babao.

Championship at Ed Parker's 1982 Long Beach Internationals. In a nearby ring at the same event, Ernie Reyes Jr. (son of Ernie Reyes) also won the Black Belt Kata Championship.

In the course of several years of competition, Jack has won and accumulated lots of trophies, medals and plaques.

Jayson knows he has still a long way to go to complete the Academy's curriculum. However, Jayson "could hardly wait" until his younger brother, Jaydon, becomes a student. That way, it will be his turn to teach his brother.

The future of the Babao Arnis System is in the hands of the successors: our three sons - Guro' Narrison, Guro' Jack, and Kris, and our four grandsons - Jayson, twins Matthew and Nathan, and Jaydon.

And the legacy continues...



Narrie and Zena with Narrison, Jack, Kris,  
and grandson Jayson



Baby brother Jaydon Babao



The patriarch Turing Babao

## **My Beginning with Grandmaster Narrie Babao**

By Master Manuel M. Francisco Jr.

Cultural identity is what led me to the Filipino martial arts. Being born in the Philippines and being brought up in the U.S., I needed to know more about who I was and my culture. After 25 years training in the Korean Martial Arts of Tae Kwon Do, I had to discover the martial arts of the Philippines.

I opened up my first Tae Kwon Do school in 1988 in San Diego, California during my college years at U.C., San Diego. During my residence in San Diego, I researched on the Filipino martial arts. The desire to learn the art led me to an Arnis instructor by the name of Narrie Babao. Grandmaster Babao was rich with knowledge and history. He was a walking encyclopedia and historian. Upon being accepted as a student, I trained rigorously under the guidance of Guro Mario Gajo, a senior instructor under Grandmaster Babao. Through my initial training, I came to realize the cultural identity of the Filipino martial arts. The richness of the history and the youthfulness of the art in the public eyes were but a few lessons I came to learn under Grandmaster Babao.

In 1990 I moved back to San Jose, California and opened a new school and have been in operation since then. The strong desire to learn more Filipino martial arts led me to meeting many known eskrimadors with the likes of Grandmaster Angel Cabales and Grandmaster Leo Giron to name a few. I went on a search for an instructor to continue my training and kept in touch with my original instructor, Grandmaster Babao. During a Doce Pares seminar, I came across the world eskrima champion from the Philippines, Percival Pableo. A friendly relationship blossomed. I trained with Percival during his stay in the U.S. Then I met Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete, the legendary Eskrimador fighter from the famed Doce Pares of Cebu, Philippines. I finally found the instructor that would continue my path in the Filipino martial arts. I've been a private student of Grandmaster Cacoy since 1990 and have reached the ranks of 7th Grade Black Belt Master Level and 5th Grade Black Belt in Pangamot under Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete. I continue to train in TaeKwonDo as well with a rank of 6th Degree Black Belt under Choi's TaeKwonDo of San Jose, California. As a Master Instructor, I see myself as a respectful student who's always learning and always improving and propagating the arts of TaeKwonDo and the Filipino martial arts.



**L-R:** Master Manuel M. Francisco, Jr., Supreme Grandmaster Ciriaco “Cacoy” Canete, Grandmaster Narrie Babao.



The P.A.M.A. Group of San Jose, California with Grandmaster Narrie Babao at his home in San Diego, California.

**L-R:** Ben Talagtag, Chris Belen, Huan Hoang, Master Manuel Francisco, Jr., Duy Hoang, Anthony Nguyen, Grandmaster Narrie Babao (seated).

The beginning will always be influential to one's journey. Grandmaster Narrie Babao has set the foundation for me in learning and understanding the Filipino martial arts. My path to acquiring the knowledge and wisdom of the Filipino martial arts was guided through the intellectual and historical teachings of Grandmaster Babao. The Pacific Alliance of Martial Arts (P.A.M.A.) Group of San Jose, California trains in TaeKwonDo and the Filipino martial arts. P.A.M.A. students learn the Arnis Babao and the Cacoy Doce Pares Systems. My senior students have traveled to San Diego to compete

in the full contact eskrima sparring at the Grand Nationals Tournament. We have also traveled to Cebu, Philippines numerous times to train and study under Supreme Grandmaster Ciriaco "Cacoy" Canete. It is important to always know one's beginning. Therefore, I make sure my students know where I started and who has taught me the "way." The senior students of P.A.M.A. have recently traveled to San Diego and trained privately with Grandmaster Narrie Babao. It was a memorable training session.

On a personal note, Grandmaster Narrie Babao is not just an effective Filipino Martial Artist but also a Shakespearean lecturer, an Elvis Impersonator with a great voice, and a gentleman. There's much to learn from Grandmaster Babao. The Filipino martial arts is a family art that's passed down from one generation to another. The Babao Arnis of San Diego under Grandmaster Babao is like family. My three oldest daughters are all black belts and know the historical and technical teachings of the Filipino martial arts. As a Master Instructor, the "beginnings" of future Filipino martial artists continues.

**About the Author:** Manuel M. Francisco, Jr., MBA is a Student of Grandmaster Narrie Babao and a Master Instructor under Supreme Grandmaster Ciriaco "Cacoy" Canete in San Jose, California. He holds the ranks of 7th Grade Black Belt in Cacoy Doce Pares Eskrima/Eskrido, 6th Degree Black Belt in TaeKwonDo, 5th Grade Black Belt in Cacoy Doce Pares Pangamot, and the Founder of P.A.M.A.





## My Quest for Excellence

By Grandmaster Dan Medina



I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1953. At the age of 17 I enlisted in the US Navy and spent the next 22 years circling the globe 2 ½ times.

My first real martial arts training started in Puerto Rico around 1973. The U.S. Navy introduced me to a combination of Judo and the Navy Seal Quick Kill method as part of my training. This was not only the spark that ignited the flame but the beginning to an intensive martial arts career.

In 1977 I was assigned to the USS Hitchiti, an ocean going tug. It was during this assignment that I was introduced to the Black Masters Sphinx Karate Clan of the Philippines by Master Ricardo Mendoza. It was a very eclectic style of martial arts that looked like a combination of Karate, Kung Fu and Filipino martial arts. After about eight months of intensive training, Master Mendoza took us to Baguio which



Master Ricardo Mendoza



Baguio training group

is in the northern

mountainous part of the Philippines. The local Sphinx group prepared a grueling training session that lasted several days. Starting from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM, the training was intense and the Masters expected 110%. It was here that I was introduced to Arnis 63 Generals. On our last day, a martial arts tournament was staged just for us. We were expected to fight and use our new skills. Thanks to the excellent instructors, we fought and none of us ended up with any serious injuries. It

was an experience I will never forget!

In 1978 I was reassigned to the City of Olongapo in the Philippines. Sphinx Karate did not have a presence in this part of the Philippines so I joined P.M.A.S. (Philippine Martial Arts Studio) where I studied Kyokushin and Kuntaw under Master Reynaldo Ginco. I still remember the pain those hands of steel could inflict. He was known for his ability to crush bed rock stones with his bare hands!

In the Philippines, I had the opportunity to put my skills to use and define what was practical and what wasn't in "real time" street situations. On loan to the Provost Martial during a time of Martial Law, I was required to enforce the law without the aid of a firearm. I really felt at this time that martial arts had to be practical and no-nonsense so I continued my search for more training. In addition to practicing Arnis 63 Generals, exchanging techniques with my roommate who was taking Aikido, I also continued my tutelage with Master Ginco whenever possible. You could say I was breathing, eating and sleeping martial arts. I just couldn't get enough.

Around 1980, I found myself stationed on the USS Belleauwood LHA-3, a marine amphibious carrier. This is where I first met Dan Inosanto while the ship was in dry dock. We hit it off instantly and I got an autographed book from him entitled "The Filipino



martial arts”. The ship finally got underway and was heading towards San Diego when one day I spotted someone on the flight deck that looked strangely familiar.

After confirming my suspicions by checking the by now well read- book about the Filipino martial arts, I could hardly believe my luck! Grandmaster Narrie Babao, the first full contact stick fighting champion of the U.S. was on my ship! I mustered up the courage to approach him and introduce myself which was instantly followed by asking Master Babao if I could become a student. My expectations were crushed however when Master Babao, graciously refused and informed me he wasn’t accepting any new students at this time. I wasn’t one for giving up so a few days later, when I found out Grandmaster Babao was in quarantine with the chicken pox, I knew it my opportunity to change his mind. Chicken pox is not something most Filipino people are exposed to as children and it can be quite severe when you catch it as an adult. Grandmaster Babao’s Filipino friends wanted nothing to do with catching the chicken pox so they stayed as far away as you possibly could on a ship. I already had the chicken pox as a child so I quickly became Grandmaster Babao’s only link to the “outside”. I brought him martial arts magazines, shared news and goings on from the ship, and generally just kept him company.

When the ship pulled into port, Grandmaster Babao was still in quarantine, so he threw his car keys at me and asked me to take his car to his wife, Zena. *“While you’re there,”* he said. *“Tell her that you’re my new student.”* I couldn’t believe my ears! I don’t remember the drive to Grandmasters house but I do remember his wife Zena telling me how lucky I was and that it was a rare thing indeed for her husband to accept new students. He had turned many away over the years and she was almost as surprised as I was at the news.

For the next four years I trained diligently under the watchful eyes of Grandmaster Babao. To say he was a perfectionist would be an understatement. As a student of Grandmaster Babao’s, you repeat a technique over and over and over again until it is perfected before you’re allowed to move to the next.

I remember one time, when I was a black shirt under Grandmaster Babao, he sent me and his young son, Jack to Singletons Karate Tournament under the guidance of his wife Zena. That day I took 2nd place in forms and Jack Babao took first place in the Black Belt Weapons divisions. This was also the first time I fought in the full contact weapons division, which proved to be quite interesting. Right at the get go, I destroyed my opponent’s shinai (Bamboo Sword).

I stopped, not wanting to hit a defenseless man. My opponent got another weapon and again I destroyed it in the first few seconds. This continued for several rounds. I probably could have won that fight but keeping my honor and not hitting an unarmed man was more important. My second fight that day, was with a skilled nunchaku fighter. It was over before it started as the nunchaku flew off into the crowd and I was again left with an unarmed opponent. I was awarded with third place since I never “finished” the fights.



Dan Medina being coached by  
Grandmaster Babao



Grandmaster Babao and Medina working out on board the  
USS Belleau Wood

After the tournament was over, I was instantly surrounded by spectators and other martial artists curious about the type of martial arts I practiced. I simply replied "Its Arnis-Kuntao/Batangas-Narrie Babao's Family Style. They all agreed, if the fights had been "real-life" situations, the winner would have been the one still holding his weapon.

As I traveled with the Navy, I continued to study with Grandmaster Babao and Master Ricardo Mendoza. At every port, I looked for classes and instructors to continue my education and broaden my experience. From Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Singapore, to Sri Lanka, and of course the Philippines, I sought out anyone who could give me more to learn, more to experience and more technique!

In 1984, I was assigned to the Sea Bees (PhibCB1) as a small arms and combat instructor. It was during this time that I met Philip Pabalinas who, in exchange for being taught Kuntao, taught me the Ocho system and Modern Arnis.



Great Grandmaster  
Braulio Pedoy

Later, in 1986, I found out that my next assignment would take me to Hawaii. Grandmaster Babao instructed me to do two things when I arrive there. The first was to seek out Snookie Sanches, a famous Escrimador who had studied with Floro Villabrille, the full contact champion of the Philippines, as an instructor. The second was to visit and offer his and my respects to the Great Grandmaster Pedoy who was retired and no longer teaching. My plane landed, I checked into my hotel and per my instructions, I wasted no time in calling Great Grandmaster Pedoy. To my surprise, I was invited to come see him that very night. I'll never forget meeting Braulio T. Pedoy for the first time. He was already 89 years old and small in size. His heavily wrinkled face had a quick smile and steely eyes. His son, Eduardo J. Pedoy, was also there and the three of us had a great time talking about the martial arts and how much I wanted to learn Escrima. I'm not sure exactly what I did to impress him but that night, he told me that if I really wanted to learn Escrima he, himself would teach me.



Great Grandmaster Pedoy defending against Medina's spear attack

For the next few years, I absorbed everything I could about the secrets of Derobio. One night Batikan Eduardo Pedoy who was then Chief Instructor, surprised me by saying *"You don't know how lucky you are! You're getting stuff I wasn't even taught!"* Batikan Eduardo Pedoy often worked late in the evenings and missed many of his father's classes.

Great Grandmaster Pedoy also realized this and felt the need to pass on his 144 counters or they would be lost forever. With his new mission in focus we started on an intensive regimen of training that not only included the techniques but also the history of the Filipino martial arts. This time period was taxing, physically (my wrists hurt for weeks), mentally and even spiritually.

Hawaii in the 1980's was a variable Mecca of Martial Arts. I was like a kid in a candy store and it didn't take me long to develop strong friendships with the leaders and founders of the most prominent art forms. Bobby Lowe, James Miyaji, Pat Nakata, Ken Funakoshi, Tomu Arakawa, Sung Au and Joe Bunch were just a few of the great people I came to know and admire.

I was both surprised and honored when Joe Bunch, then president of the Hawaii Karate Congress, sponsored me as an instructor. After a secretive, closed door voting process, I was accepted into the Organization. For me, this was an incredible honor since many hopeful instructors, some I even knew, were turned away. To this day, I contribute a lot of my knowledge about general martial arts history and culture to these gentlemen and will forever be grateful to them.

During this amazing time, I skippered a small ocean going Navy vessel that traveled between Honolulu and Kauai. This was where I met Greg Lontayao and had the opportunity to visit the original Kali Grandmaster Floro Villabrille in Kapaa. He showed me the certificate that was issued by the then Governor General Murphy proclaiming Villabrille the champion of the Philippines in stick-fighting. As if that was incredible in itself, before leaving his house he had me kneel down and face the sun. He placed his hand on my head and proceeded to place a blessing on me. I had only been blessed like this once before (by Great Grandmaster Pedoy upon being promoted to full instructor in Derobio) and the memory will stay with me always.

My next military assignment took me to Albuquerque, New Mexico. I contacted a local school with hopes of being able to teach. As luck would have it, I got a hold of Shihan Ray Barerra, who was an International Karate and Kickboxing and International Martial Arts Hall of Fame instructor. He asked me to show him what I did and after giving him a brief demonstration of my skills, he marched into his office and began calling all the other martial arts schools in Albuquerque. This part of the country had never been exposed to the Philippine martial arts and I was treated like the new “hot commodity”. I received offers from many schools to teach and many others to do seminars. I had spent years accumulating knowledge and I was ready to share it with anyone who wanted to learn.

As a result of this firestorm, today there are close to 1000 Escrima students in the Albuquerque / Santa Fe area. Of the students I am proud to have taught, some of the more famous ones are Arlan (Salty Dog) Sanford, my protégé Professor Brandon Jordan, now teaching in the Miami area, Chief Instructor Antionette Chavez, Owner of Takai Mine Karate, who continues to represent Majapai in New Mexico, and Chief Instructor Melchor Chavez.

Many skilled and well known instructors call New Mexico their home. This offered me the opportunity to train in Serrada with Bruce Albach, and exchange ideas with Jimmy Tacosa and one of the most famous MMA instructors in the USA today, Greg Jackson.

At one time, during a summer camp in New Mexico, I demonstrated how to defend against multiple opponents. Seated among the audience was Richard Bustillo. After my performance, he told me, “*I know Derobio, and what you did was create a new animal.*” To me that was a great compliment, coming from the mouth of one of Bruce Lee’s training partners.

Currently, I am the Founder and Grandmaster of Majapai, the culmination of my martial art training and experiences. I am Regional High Chief in Derobio Escrima under Great Grandmaster Braulio Pedoy, and Rajah (6th Degree Red & White Belt), Florida Vice President for Sphinx Karate & Arnis 63 Generals under Ricardo Medoza and the Father of Sphinx Karate Jimmy B. Galez. I hold a 3rd Dan Kobudo under Shihan Ray Barrera and have recieved an honorary Doctorate for my contributions to the martial arts from the Euro Technical University. Grandmaster Sam Allred also awarded me an honorary Black Belt for my contributions to the art of Kajukembo.

After 9-11, I donated my services to the pilots and flight attendants, teaching them bladed weapons defense techniques.

In my martial arts journey, I have truly been blessed by the many individuals I had the honor of studying with, befriending and teaching.

I currently reside with my wife and two children (all students) in Kingsland, Georgia. After having taught at several schools in the area, I have recently opened my own school in Fernandina Beach on Amelia Island (near the Florida/Georgia border) and hold classes in St. Mary’s, Georgia as well. My



Grandmaster Medina with New Mexico students





seminar schedule keeps me traveling quite a bit but always offers me the opportunity to see old friends.

For more information please visit my website:



[www.medina-escrima.com](http://www.medina-escrima.com)

## **Guro Mario Gajo**

### **Perpetuating a Legacy of Filipino Martial Arts**

By Velma Tajalle-Gajo

The man pacing up and down the length of the 5600 square foot martial arts studio calls out to a large group of students including men, women and children “First set of fifteens, down!” The students are in the process of warming up for instruction in the Filipino martial arts.

Already perspiration was dripping from their bodies. The man is simply attired in a red t-shirt with the school insignia and a pair of black warm up pants. The man’s name is Mario Gajo, known by many in the Filipino martial arts community simply as “Guro Mario”. A lifelong Filipino martial arts practitioner, Guro Mario was certified as an instructor by his longtime Arnis instructor and mentor, Grandmaster Narrie Babao of Babao Arnis.

Guro Mario was born in the Philippines and was first introduced to Eskrima at the age of 3 by his grandfather Bonifacio Mendones. Guro Mario was born the 4th child of Santiago and Susanna Mendones on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Later he was adopted by his Uncle, Marcelino Gajo and biological Aunt Dionisia Mendones Gajo and immigrated with them to the United States.

In 1969, Guro Mario’s father, Marcelino was transferred by the US Navy to Hawaii. In 1970, Guro Mario attended a martial arts class sponsored by the Pearl Harbor Youth Center. His head Instructor was Professor George Wallace of Hawaiian Kenpo Karate. He studied Kenpo for a while with Professor George Wallace then in 1971, Guro Mario joined Wok Chek’s White Crane Kung Fu Academy of Hawaii. Guro Mario spent 2 years attending the academy, 4 nights a week. He received his red sash becoming the youngest associate certified Instructor in 1973 at the age of 15.

In 1974, Guro Mario’s family was relocated back to San Diego, California. During this time Mario continued to practice martial arts with his father, Marcelino Gajo, who is a 2nd degree black belt in Shitoru Karate.



Guro Mario met with Guro Ted Lucaylucay in 1981 and was reintroduced to the Filipino martial arts of stick fighting, also known by the names of Arnis, Eskrima and Kali at the Orange County, Lee Jun Fan Academy. He trained with Guro Lucaylucay for several months but because the commute to Orange County from San Diego was too distant he asked Guro Lucaylucay for a referral to an instructor in San Diego. Guro Lucaylucay referred Mario to Grandmaster Narrie Babao of San Diego.

Five years later in 1986, Guro Mario finally met with Grandmaster Babao. The long awaited meeting was due to the fact that Grandmaster Babao was in the U.S. Navy and because he was stationed on board one the ships based in San Diego he was constantly in and out of the Port of San Diego. The fact that the Grandmaster did not advertise where his school was located also played a part in their delayed meeting.

Grandmaster Babao took Mario under his wing until Guro Mario achieved his Maestro certification in 1989. Under Grandmaster Babao's instruction, Mario learned the Babao style of Arnis, Doce Pares Eskrima, Largo Mano, Floro Villabrille Kali, Numerado, Cinco Tera, Kuntao, Mano Mano, and Dumog. In 1997, Grandmaster Babao promoted Mario to Guro. While studying under Grandmaster Babao, Guro Mario had the privilege of meeting Master Dan Inosanto, the late Master Edgar G. Sulite, Supreme Grandmaster Diony Canete, Supreme Grandmaster Cacoy Canete, Grandmaster Ben Largusa, Grandmaster Richard Bustillo, Graciela Casillas-Boggs as well as many other well known Eskrimadors and martial artist.

In 1991, Mario teamed up with Thai Boxing Champion Vince Soberano and taught stick fighting at San Diego's Black Tiger Gym. Since 1991, Vince



**L-R:** Master Ricketts, Guro Mario Gajo, Guro Dan Inosanto, Master Edgar Sulite and Alanmar Gajo (Young Boy)



Adjarn Vince Soberano

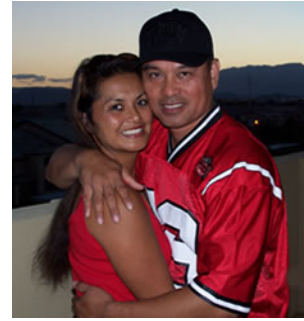


Soberano has been promoted to Master (Adjarn) in the martial arts style of Muay Thai and recently honored Guro Mario with advancement to “Kru, 6th Dan” in the style of Black Tiger Muay Thai.

Mario also assisted World Thai Boxing Champion

Melchor Menor of Las Vegas to open San Diego's Mel's House of Thunder in teaching Filipino martial arts along with Thai boxing and woman's self defense in 1996. Melchor is well established in the San Diego physical fitness community as a personal coach to athletes including Shawne Merriman of the San Diego Chargers.

Mel's House of Thunder is also where he and his high school friend, Velma Tajalle became reacquainted. Velma was a student of Melchor's Muay Thai class and noticed that Mario had an Eskrima class immediately following her workout. Velma's brother Rick had been a student of Mario's since 1990 and Rick had recommended Guro Mario's class for her sons. Velma had always been an avid martial artist and asked Guro Mario if she, her sons and niece could join Guro Mario's Eskrima class.



Guro Gajo and his wife  
Maestra Velma



Guro Bill, Grandmaster Babao,  
Guro Gajo and Graciela  
Casillas-Boggs



Grandmaster Babao and Guro Mario

### **Guro Mario Gajo Training Under Grandmaster Narrie Babao**

The date was September 24, 1986. It was a rainy night when Guro Mario first met the gentleman who would become his instructor for over 23 years. The gentleman's name, Grandmaster Narrie Babao, he was highly regarded as one of the best teachers of Filipino martial arts in the San Diego area.

Grandmaster Babao was recommended to Guro Mario by his previous instructor, Guro Ted LucayLucay. He had encouraged Guro Mario to try to locate Grandmaster Babao since both were living in the San Diego area at that time. Guro Ted LucayLucay high recommendation of Grandmaster Babao is the reason he came to be in Grandmaster Babao's garage on that rainy night on September 24th 1986.

On that evening another new student was in attendance. His name was Rusty. Rusty appeared to Guro Mario to be pretty determined to take the class as well since he had made the 50 minute drive from Oceanside to Spring Valley to attend Grandmaster Babao's class. As they waited for class to begin, he noticed that the garage wall was covered with photos of people who looked to be martial artists. At that time Guro Mario had no knowledge of the identity of the individuals in the photos. Eventually he would learn the names of the people in the photos as well as their relationship with this man that had come highly recommended by Guro LucayLucay to be his instructor. It was time to begin class. Grandmaster Babao's two very young sons, Jack and Kris entered the garage. Little did Guro Mario and Rusty know that these young boys would be assisting with his instruction. They each partnered up with one of the Grandmaster's sons. Guro Mario

partnered up with Jack while Rusty partnered up with Kris. This night they began their instruction in Babao Arnis by learning the 6 basic angles of attack.

After a few months of training, an old childhood friend of Guro Mario's, Mattis Alonsagay, showed up to participate in the class. Mattis, Guro Mario called him "Matt" was one of Grandmaster Babao's senior students who had returned to study again with Grandmaster Babao. When Grandmaster Babao went overseas, because he was still in the Navy, Matt became Guro Mario's guide and mentor. He was still able to receive the benefit of Grandmaster Babao's teaching during the times he was absent overseas through Matt. Matt became Guro Mario's surrogate instructor during these times and taught him the lessons Matt had received from Grandmaster Babao. Guro Mario recalled the day of his promotion to Maestro. He said, "That day will remain in my memory for two reasons. The reasons were not only because of my promotion and the hard earned achievement and subsequent promotion to Maestro, it was also the date of my good friend, mentor and guide, Matt's, untimely death".



Guro Matt Alonsagay and  
Guro Mario Gajo

Guro Mario also related how he was honored to be selected by Grandmaster Babao to be a part of his entourage of Eskrimadors to act as a personal body guard Cardinal Jaime Sin. Cardinal Sin at that time would be visiting San Diego, the Catholic Diocese of San Diego as well as speaking at public venues. Guro Mario was assigned to personally guard Cardinal Sin and was positioned to always be at the Cardinal's right side from the moment he arrived and was transported from the San Diego International Airport to the time of his departure. It was part of Guro Mario's duty to escort him during his press interviews, as well as the scheduled Sunday mass that was held at the University of San Diego football stadium.



Workouts under Grandmaster Babao were almost always completed with his fellow student Guro Bill Rosario. Guro Bill was a member of SEAL team 6 (during the Vietnam War). He and Guro Mario would begin their warm-up by running wind sprints up a steep hill, approximately 100 yards, 10 times. After that, they would study the assigned lesson plan. Both Guro Bill and Guro Mario found that they both had a preference for applying their lessons in action by sparring against each other and utilizing that particular lesson's technique. During one session, he remembered the two of them were sparring with live knives. Guro Mario said, "We had padded our hands and at some time during the session I happened to get cut. I did not realize it until Guro Bill noticed that my white pads had turned red." The wound became a scar and is still visible on his hand.



## About the Gajo Family

In 1999, Guro Mario and Velma married and embarked on raising a blended family of five boys, Alanmar, Jason, Adam, Kiel and Aaron. Guro Mario and Maestra Velma attribute having both parents as avid martial arts practitioners and keeping all of the boys involved in sports and martial arts in particular, to keeping them focused and preventing them from succumbing to the peer pressure that plague a lot of the youth today. All of the five boys are very well versed in both Eskrima and Muay Thai techniques. Three of them (Adam, Kiel and Aaron) recently joined their parents at the San Diego Grand Internationals and participated in the competitions (Eskrima and blade fighting) as well as the “Legacy”



Alanmar



Jason



Adam



Kiel



Aaron



demonstration during the event. Adam is the current 2009 Eskrima Division Grand Champion for the San Diego Grand Internationals.

Two of their sons are in the armed forces, one is an enrollment counselor for a private college, and another is a behavioral aide for autistic children and another completing college. Their oldest son, Alanmar, and his wife recently were blessed with a son, the first grandchild of Guro Mario and Maestra Velma. There is no question in his grandparents' minds that this child's father will share the Gajo Family martial arts legacy with him as well.

Participation in the family martial arts school has extended to several of the Gajo sons' girlfriends as well. Kiel's fiancée, Angela also recently competed and placed against the males in the blade sport division at the San Diego Grand Internationals. Aaron's (the youngest of the five boys) girlfriend has also embarked on learning Eskrima and can be found practicing with the rest of the class as well. The Gajo family martial arts legacy is being perpetuated through Guro Mario and Maestra Velma's five sons.

Guro Mario's list of accomplishments as a martial arts competitor are impressive although his humble demeanor would not lead you to think that he currently holds and successfully defended his title for the second year at the Best of the Best Masters/Grandmasters challenge held in Orange County, California, a unique Eskrima competition format with minimal protective gear (helmet, gloves and cup) that demands that competitors be in top condition to participate. This format appealed to the now over 50 year old eskrimador instructor since the tournament format was one that forces the competitors to "respect the stick". In 2007, Guro Mario came out of retirement from competition, entered the Best of the Best Masters/Grandmasters Division Challenge and brought home the championship. He repeated his performance in 2008 and is the current defending champion of the Best of the Best Masters/Grandmasters Division Challenge for the 2nd year in a row.

Guro Mario's students are well known for being fierce competitors in the ring however they all subscribe to his philosophy of camaraderie, sportsmanship and sharing of martial arts knowledge. In 1998, Mario established the Gajo Martial Arts Bothoan. He regularly conducts classes teaching and promoting the Filipino martial arts and Muay Thai Boxing in the San Diego North County in 4S Ranch (Rancho Bernardo area) at West Coast Martial Arts Academy. Guro Mario is sought out by police departments and universities for his expertise in Eskrima, self defense as well as hand to hand combat techniques.

#### Masters/Grandmasters Div. Champion



Guro Mario Gajo 2007



Guro Mario Gajo 2008



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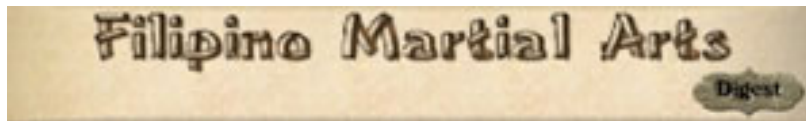




The Woman behind the Man - Zena Sultana Babao



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