

TRAINING IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract: This article is a combined account of two trips by two small groups of Eskrimadors, lead by Pangulong Guro Krishna Godhania, to the Philippines in 2002 and 2004.

Introduction

It is every martial artist's dream to train in the home country of their particular art, whether it is in Brazil, China, Japan, Korea, or the Philippines. The Philippines consists of around 7000 islands, and has a population of over 84 million people. Cebu is an island with a population of around 3 million people in the Central (Visayas) region of the Philippines.

The Journey

After overcoming the jetlag with a one night stopover in Cebu city, we were up early and off for a five hour minibus trip, travelling along busy city streets and winding mountain roads at a rather 'brisk pace', with Krishna pointing out important landmarks along the way.

We arrived at our destination late that evening—a small fishing village in Southwest Cebu. Our accommodation was of a good standard, with most of us having en-suite single rooms. The facilities were well maintained, clean and safe.

We were situated right next to the beach and the view was beautiful, especially at dawn and sunset. At night the fishing boats would go out and the light from the lanterns would dance on the water. We looked forward to every meal, which was well prepared by our hosts and consisted of local produce, including fish, chicken, vegetables and rice—delicious! We went to sleep each night listening to the sound of waves lapping on the shore.



Figure 1. GM Taneo and PG Godhania espada y daga in the rice fields.

Training

Each training day started at 6 am. The Grandmasters were usually up at 5-5:30am, and on the beach warming up! There were 3 two-hour blocks of tuition each day, and an additional 2-3 hours of our own personal training. Hence we were training for an average of 8 hours a day for 7 days, often in the hot sun. We were rapidly improving our martial arts skill and our tans at the same time!

There was an excellent teacher-to-student ratio. Our teaching was always personalized, with constructive feedback, and detailed explanations.

The full spectrum of the Filipino martial arts was covered on this trip including: stick fighting (including short staff and long staff); knife fighting; empty hand training (panantukan, dumog); flexible weapons (including the whip); and projectile weapons (including knife and spear throwing). We also learnt, sometimes painfully, how to deal with various projectiles being thrown at you!

There was a strong emphasis on environmental training, with techniques being performed on sand, gravel, earth and in the water [Figure 1]. Grappling training (dumog) in the water is challenging as movements are slowed down, visibility can be limited, but throws can generally be executed without serious harm to your training partner.

Every day there was constant awareness training, in order to be able to perceive threats in your environment, and respond appropriately to them in a timely manner. There were thought-provoking discussions led by Grandmaster Abner Pasa every day, which addressed the principles underlying the art.

On the first trip we went on a 2 km uphill trek, in sweltering heat, into the forest where we were introduced to the use of the Bolo in harvesting trees for use as weapons (spears, staffs) in our training. [Figure 2, Figure 3]

The use of innovative local training equipment was fascinating. These devices ranged from a stick or staff on a string for reactive blocking training, to the trunk of a banana tree on a tripod to simulate the impact on a human body of both blunt and



Figure 2. Group photo_after bolo practice.

edged weapons. The use of coconut shells for footwork training, as used in the traditional fiestas held in the villages, was also very interesting.

Sparring

Sparring was a major element of the training. The emphasis was on how to be an intelligent fighter, with strong defensive and offensive capabilities, and not a fighter who charges blindly forwards with a barrage of strikes, hoping to bludgeon the opponent into submission.

Sparring with various weapons was also done at dusk, which presented a significant challenge! The shadows played havoc with our perception of depth and distance, and hence judging the range of incoming and outgoing strikes became more difficult.

The simulation knife fighting, using paint-tipped padded knives, was good fun! – especially when we



Figure 3. Group photo (Left to right): Back – Krishna, GM Pasa, GM Taneo, Chris; Front – Paul, Mark, Noel.

were tied together at the waist to limit the fighting distance, and to ensure there was nowhere to run! We learned how easy it is to get maimed or killed in a very short time. The importance of having respect for edged weapons was further reinforced by time spent on slow motion live blade training.

Farewell

All too soon it was time to say goodbye to the village, and head back to Cebu City, where we had a tour of the major sights of interest including: the Museum of the University of San Carlos; Fort San Pedro; Magellan’s Cross; and Lapu Lapu’s memorial on Mactan island. For some of us who had seen the mural of the famous battle between Lapu Lapu and Magellan on the BBC series, “The Way of the Warrior”, back in the 1980s, it was the realisation of a lifelong dream. [Figure 4]

Conclusion

Many Westerners often get the “Tourist version” of the martial arts, by staying in hotels and training in the local martial arts gym for a few hours a day.

On this trip we were able to eat, sleep and breathe Eskrima, due to our immersion in the culture at the village level. It was therefore possible to gain a first hand appreciation of the predominantly edged-weapon oriented environment in which the Art had its genesis.

To gain real insight into the development of the martial art we train, it is necessary to train in the art at its source, and we strongly recommend this to all martial artists.

We would like to express our profound thanks and gratitude to Grandmaster Abner Pasa, Grandmaster Pacifico Taneo, Grandmaster Tanny Campo, and Master Orville Visitacion for their time and patience in making these trips a reality.



Figure 4. The mural of Lapu Lapu and Magellan engaged in combat