



## History of Babao Arnis

In November 1963, 18 year-old Narciso “Narrie” Requina Babao reluctantly started his Arnis de Mano training under his father, the late Turing Babao. The style he learned was the Baston Batangas system, which his father learned from Master Ka Juan, a Katipunan rebel under General Miguel Malvar, during the Filipino-American war.

Turing Babao was suffering from hypertension, and his doctor advised him to workout daily, to alleviate the problem. Narrie had other interests then. Foremost was bodybuilding and weightlifting. He was selected as the 1964 Jr. Mr. Philippines, during a contest sponsored by

PWABBA (Philippine Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Association).

For two years, the father and son trained hard in Arnis. Twirling the rattan sticks was the only warm-up exercise. Their training consisted mainly of free-style sparring. Only after getting hit, would Narrie learn the lesson for the day. His father would then methodically explain why Narrie got hit in that particular area.

Narrie described the training as the school of hard knocks, and he resented being on the receiving end. His father was precise in controlling his strikes to the head and body, but accidental hits to the knuckles were unavoidable.

With his knuckles busted many times over, Narrie finally found a good excuse for getting away from Arnis training. He enrolled in a karate school. His Shotokan karate instructor was Romeo Plantado, a former police officer who became a fugitive, and eventually a commander of the New People's Army, the communist rebels in the Philippines. However, it was Master Jimmy Galez of Manila, who awarded Narrie his first black belt.

The first thing Narrie did after his promotion in Manila, was to challenge his father in a weaponless sparring. Narrie realized his mistake too late. His father never revealed the fact that he also studied Jujitsu from a Japanese businessman, whom he befriended. In 1968, Narrie joined the United States Navy. His first students were some of the sailors and Marines on board the USS New Orleans (LPH-11), which spent three tours of duty in Vietnam. At one time, one of his Marine students came back to the ship in a body bag after a mission. Whenever his ship was in Subic Bay, Narrie would spend time at the school of the Philippine Kuntaw Association, which was owned by Grandmaster Carlito Lanada. In time, Narrie was awarded a fourth degree black belt in Kuntao.

Turing Babao did not teach his Arnis system to anyone else. Without a sparring partner, his daily workout diminished. He finally passed away, after a third stroke.

In 1975, Narrie Babao met Dan Inosanto and Richard Bustillo. On many occasions, Dan and Narrie would exchange their knowledge of the Filipino martial arts. The two became "kumpadres", Dan is the godfather of Narrie's youngest son, Kris. Narrie and his wife, Zena, have two other sons, Narrison and Jack, who are now Master and Guro (instructors) in Babao Arnis.

In 1976, Dan Inosanto introduced Narrie to Kali Master Ben Largusa, who accepted him as a disciple. In November 1976, Narrie and Dan formally introduced the arts of Arnis and Eskrima to the people of San Diego, California.

In July 1978, Narrie became the first Weapons Sparring champion, during a tournament sponsored by Ben Singleton in Vista, California. It was the first of its kind in American martial arts competition, where the fighters would select the weapon of their choice. Narrie defeated other instructors, who used esoteric weapons like the nunchakus, bo, and shinai. It was also that year, when Narrie Babao was promoted as Kali Guro' by Grandmaster Floro Villabrille and Grandmaster Ben Largusa.

In 1981, Narrie met Doce Pares Grandmaster Cacoy Canete, the undefeated stick fighter in the Philippines. Narrie was captivated by the close quarter combat fluidity of Eskrido, the art that was developed by Grandmaster Cacoy. During his visit to the Cebu City Doce Pares headquarters in 1984, Narrie was promoted to the rank of 4th Grade Black belt. His certificate was signed by Grandmaster Yoling Canete, Grandmaster Cacoy Canete, and Grandmaster Diony Canete. In 1996, Grandmaster Cacoy conferred on Narrie Babao the rank of 6th Grade Master of Eskrima. In October 25, 1997, Grandmaster Cacoy Canete once again promoted Narrie to 8th Grade Master.

In 2007, Grandmaster Cacoy promoted Narrie Babao to the rank of 9th Grade Grandmaster of Doce Pares Eskrido. (Black Belt Club USA, 2011).

On June 19, 2010, Narrie Babao was inducted into the Martial Artists' "Masters Hall of Fame" and received the Platinum Life Achievement Award. (Black Belt Club USA, 2013).

On January 30, 2012, GM Narrie Babao was promoted to 10th Grade Black Belt Grand Master in Doce Pares Eskrima by Supreme Grandmaster (SGM) Ciriaco "Cacoy" Cañete . (Catherine-Kitty Canete-Knight, personal communication, January 30, 2012). SGM Cacoy Cañete is the founder of Cacoy Doce Pares Eskrima and developed the art of Eskrido. Grand Master Narrie Babao also has the rank of Guro in (Villabrille-Largusa Kali) Kali by Grandmaster Floro Villabrille and Grandmaster Ben Largusa, ; 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt Kuntao by Grandmaster Carlito Lanada, Philippine Kuntaw Association (Olongapo City, Philippines); 1<sup>st</sup> Dan Sphinx Karate by Master Jimmy Galez, Black Master Sphinx Karate System (Manila, Philippines); Brown Belt Shotokan Karate under Rafael and Romeo Plantado, Griffins Karate Club (Naga City, Philippines). (Z. Babao, 2009).

Like the three sides of the triangle, the Babao Arnis system is composed of three main fighting systems; Villabrille-Largusa Kali, Cacooy Doce Pares, and the original Baston Batangas taught by Turing Babao.

(Babao Arnis, 2005).

From 1978 to the present time (2013), Grandmaster Narrie Babao has only promoted to the rank of Arnis instructors, 3 Masters and 18 Guros. Most of his students were already black belt instructors in other martial arts, when they applied for Arnis training. Many of his students are involved in law enforcement.

(Babao Arnis, 2013).

#### REST IN PEACE WITH THE LORD, NARRIE BABAO

GM Narrie Babao passed away on Friday, October 11, 2013, around 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon, at the ICU at Balboa Naval Hospital San Diego. He had a stroke followed by heart attack. He is survived by his wife Zena, and three sons; Master Narrison, Guro Jack, and Maestro Kris.

(Z. Babao, personal communication, October 11, 2013).

Master Narrison Babao, son of GM Narrie Babao, has been chosen to be the next patriarch, caretaker, & head of the Babao Arnis System. He will be promoted to Sr. Master, Babao Arnis System, during GM Narrie Babao's internment.

(Z. Babao, personal communication, October 13, 2013).

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