

ESCRIMA: MARTIAL ART

by
**Carlton Kramer, Kenton Kramer
and Knut Peacock**

The art of Escrima has a long and colorful past, but much has been lost because none of it was ever recorded in writing. Masters and teachers of the art would pass their knowledge and secrets to only those select few who were deserving of such talent. Today, we are lucky enough to have some masters who are willing to share their art with others. These masters are concerned with promoting the Filipino culture and demonstrating to the public that the Filipinos have a martial art form of their own. The history of Escrima parallels the development of the Philippines as a nation, and the art has had extensive impact on national history.

The natives were skilled in the use of bow and arrow, wooden spears and sticks for hunting and protection. They were intelligent people, quick to learn and adapt to new ways.

Around 200 A.D., Arab traders brought bladed metallic weapons and a fluid style of fighting to the islands. These Moslems, who settled on the southern island of Mindanao, are noted for their tenacity and ability to fend off invaders. In fact, the original name for Escrima, "Kali," was derived from the word "kalis," a type of Moslem sword.



Later, in the 9th century, the Chinese immigrated to the Philippines, bringing their influence to Escrima. Trade was also heavy with Japan in the pre-Spanish years (around the 15th Century) and their martial art system effected additional changes in the art. The Spanish merchants, who followed Magellan in the mid-1500s, brought their style of "Espada y daga" (sword and dagger) which the natives were quick to adopt. All these visiting outsiders had an effect on the art in varying degrees and it developed into a deadly and skillful form of fighting.

The Spanish were the cause of the art's secrecy. During their move to Christianize, claim and exploit the Filipinos, the Spanish decided that the art was much too dangerous to their attempts to conquer these people. They announced that Escrima was illegal to practice or teach, and the penalty for violation of the law was death,



Because the Philippines are so vast and the art could have endless variations, innumerable styles developed. For 350 years, the Spanish were in political control of the islands, and the cloak of secrecy grew even darker. Many moves, countermoves, and techniques must have been lost during this period, but no one can say for sure. The Spanish, it should be noted, did not control all of the land in the Philippines, only the vital coastal and fringe areas; they dared not enter the forests and jungles which were inhabited by ferocious natives, countless snakes and other perils.

By the 1900s, the Spanish oppression of Escrima had really taken its toll on the future of the art. Few remained who knew the practice and even fewer who were willing to admit they knew Escrima.

Next, the Americans came into the picture after defeating the Spanish in the Spanish-American War of 1899. For five years, the Filipinos fought the Americans, who desired peace but resembled the Spanish too closely to be recognized as a different nation.

