

THE BIRTH OF MARCIAL TIRADA KALI

By Guru James Hogue

Punong Guro Anthony Blankaflor Marcial was born in Quezon City, Philippines to Edgardo & Aurora Marcial in June of 1954. Tony as his students call him began his martial arts training with his father at the age of 7 years old in Shotokan Karate, where his father Edgardo is a 3 Dan Black Belt. At the age of 8 years old Tony met Guro Roberto Sarmiento and began to train with him in his unique martial art system.

FOCUS ON GURO ROBERTO SARMIENTO

Grand Tuhon Roberto Sarmiento was a bi-racial child born to a Filipino father and a Chinese mother in the Pangasinan Province of the Philippines. Roberto's uncle Master Chen (Tony forgot his last name) on his mother's side would train him in the White Crane style of Gung Fu. Tony isn't sure how long Roberto studied this system with his uncle Chen, but Tony does remember that he was a great Gung Fu practitioner and teacher. Roberto also received training in Arnis from his uncle Grand Tuhon Nonoy Sarmiento. Nonoy taught Roberto the concept of fighting with double sticks and footwork evasion.

Roberto then came in contact with many arnis Instructors where he traded information and skills. Tatang Carlito Guadalupe taught Roberto single stick fighting and knife fighting skills. Mr. Pedrito Sayam from Mindanao instructed Roberto in many other knife fighting drills and techniques, and in Mano Y Mano (Empty Hand Fighting Skills) focusing mostly on using the elbows and knees. Roberto further met other arnis players, exchanging techniques, flow drills, mixing their systems to create a better system to fight with. As the years went by, their group got bigger and eventually created a private association called the Barong Society. This association was created so that no other players could join. After a few years, the society broke up and they went their own separate ways.

Roberto then combined these skills to form a new hybrid system called Chuan Chi Tzuan Gung Fu, and his Arnis system was called Pangasinan Arnis after his home town. Roberto used the forms of Gung Fu with the free flow soft style, and the combat principles of Arnis to make a great Filipino/Chinese martial arts. Roberto went to Manila and resided in Espana Extension where Tony met him and began training with Roberto other students made up of his two sons and three nephews. Tony and only one of Roberto's sons trained in the Chuan Chi Tzuan Gung Fu system. Roberto's Arnis was only taught in the Sarmiento family. However, since Roberto was best friends with Tony father, and Tony was best friends with Roberto's youngest son, he made an exception.

TONY'S TRAINING: HARD LESSONS LEARNED

Tony continued training with Roberto and would take excursion to visit Roberto old friends from the Barong Society. On one such excursion Tony remembered that he had a hard lesson that he learned about fighting. In 1964 Tony was 11 years old and went on an

excursion to Bacolod City. Roberto's friend (Tony doesn't recall his name) owned an Arnis school made up of mainly his son and some nephews. Roberto and Tony ended up doing a lot of sparring with long sticks and short sticks (used as a knife). Tony remembers mostly getting a lot of bruises on their arms and hands, and being very sore. The two Arnis teacher then pitted their students against each other in an empty hand sparring match. Tony's opponent had a black belt in Okinawain Karate and was 2 years older than him although they were the same height. Tony and his opponent started sparring, the competitive nature of both young martial artist led to tempers flaring. The contact got harder and more serious as both martial artist set on winning the match up. Tony remembers giving his opponent a side kick to the stomach so hard that he was gasping for breath. The fight resumed with revenge on the mind of his opponent. Tony's opponent gave him a double front kick the stomach followed up a hammer fist to Tony's right collar bone. Tony remembers that it felt like his collar bone was broke and that he pain was so intense that he passed out. Tony woke up in a local hospital with no feeling in the right side of his body. Fortunately for Tony, he was only temporally paralyzed for 3 months. Tony said that Roberto and him went back to Bacolod City 6 months after his recovery to Roberto's friend's school again. Tony sparred the same kid that paralyzed him 9 months ago. Tony said that he got him back because in this sparring match he broke his opponent's jaw. Tony joking told me that lesson taught him to block next time.

THE MAKING OF A GURO

Tony moved to the United States in 1969 where he settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Tony started teaching the Roberto's Chuan Chi Tzuan Gung Fu openly and then teaching the Pangasinan Arnis underground to only the most loyal of students. I remember meeting Tony in the June of 1986 at the age of 16 years old at Tony's very first martial arts school called the "Philippine School of Martial Arts". The school was located on Fulton Ave just a few doors down from the second district police station.

Tony's first school closed down only after six months of being open. Tony continued to teach the loyal student followed him from his school to basements and garages. There were very few traditions in this school than other martial arts schools. The system had no real restructure to it, you just came in and what Tony taught is what you learned. At first you learn only hand strikes and kicks, then only after mastering them do you move onto learning Gung Fu forms and fighting techniques. I remember a two-man single stick form that showed how the Arnis and Gung Fu was combined into one system which Roberto developed himself.

The basic of Chuan Chi Tzuan Gung Fu is like most other Gung Fu system with fast, flashy, and fancy high kicks. However, the sparring was very steady and direct like most Filipino Martial Arts. As you progressed your training included weapons like single stick, double sticks, stick and knife (espana y daga), sibat (Filipino Staff), knife fighting, and broadsword. Tony became very well known in the City of Cleveland because of students like me and James Ortega competing in local tournaments. Tony also would compete usually taking home a couple of trophies. For a basement school we where tough fighters and earned the respect of the other schools.

In 1990 Tony open his second school called the “Philippine Institute of Martial Arts” teaching Roberto’s Pangasinan Arnis. When Tony started teaching traditional Filipino Martial Arts, the system of Kali was very well known at the time because of the Jeet Kune Do stylist. Tony decided to teach his teacher’s art as Pangasinan Kali. For the first time, Tony had to put this art into a structured system so he could market the art to the general public. During the late 1990’s Tony mixed Roberto’s two systems into one system and re-named it Marcial Tirada Kali. Tirada means continuous rapid strikes with any weapon or no weapon. The Tirada Kali stick fighting system is base on multiple rapid hitting coming from odd angels while the empty hand skills employs in close fighting using Panantukan (Filipino Boxing), Dumog (Filipino Grappling), and brutal finishing moves.

Tony continues to teach his art in the City of North Royalton, Ohio a suburb of Cleveland. Tony has now taught hundreds of people and has been inducted into the Philippine Martial Arts Hall of Fame, in Ohio & Texas. To this day, Tony refuses for anyone to call him Tuhon (Master) because of his humbleness. Anyone that has ever seen him move and ever trained with him will tell you that Tony is a true Master of his art.

Thank you Punong Guro for all the training you have given me over the years. You are my role-model, my mentor, and my friend.