

Interview of Master Eddy Velez

(December 28, 2009 - Cebu City, Philippines)

By Fabien Jolivel

I went to the Philippines to avoid winter in my place (France) and to celebrate my Christmas and New Year in this country. I preferred to go to Cebu City where the climate is nice and hot. Every time that I arrive to the Philippines, I always visit my teacher of Balintawak - Grandmaster Nick Elizar and his family that I meet in 2005. In never stop to train and was lucky to come to the Philippines very often to practice with him and many masters. Grandmaster Nick Elizar always offers me the opportunity to practice with other masters and other styles, to develop my own analyse in my practice of Balintawak.

He invited me to attend the WOTBAG Christmas party together with his two sons, Norman and Neil Elizar. WOTBAG is a newly organized group by the Balintawak members with some old practitioners, together with the three sons of the late Grandmaster Teofilo Velez who are Chito, Monie and Eddie Velez.

For me, it was the opportunity to meet some of the old Balintawak players, together with the new generation of Eskrimadors. The party was held at the Headquarters of WOTBAG, to the place of Master Oliver G. Mag-uyon in Guadalupe, Cebu City.

The lechon (whole roasted pig) was so delicious and the food was in abundance, with the popular San Miguel beer and Tuba; a native wine which most Filipino people love to drink (made from the coconut juice).

The party was nice, many

conversations about the Balintawak, some of them remember the past and some of them are singing together with the old Eskrimadors. The party was nice and everyone was happy.

I find it nice to see some old friends (Grandmaster Chito Velez, Grandmaster Nick Elizar, Master Eddie Velez...) singing together and making jokes which they probably did in the past.

Grandmaster Nick Elizar introduced me to Master Eddie Velez so I will be given the opportunity to be trained with one of the best Balintawak teacher and player. With Master Eddie Velez, we planned to train in the morning and afternoon, four to five hours a day. At the beginning, Master Eddie Velez was a little distant with me to check my ability on the Balintawak style.

Then humbly, Eddie Velez gives me some advices and explained to me the application of



With the old tee shirt of Balintawak, Norman Elizar (who is probably one of the next Grandmaster of Balintawak) invites you to drink the tuba wine.



some techniques. He gets a stick and he uses a diver's suit for his protection, then he started to teach me how to hit properly my opponent and gave me some ideas.

After a few days only, I memorized his hitting techniques, but I will still need lots of training and many years of practice to have his kind of ability to fight. He is a very good teacher, he shares un-



Nick Elizar and Eddy Velez like before and always friends.

selfishly to all his students, and he does not keep secrets. It is not very often that a master like him will be willing to practice hard and accept hard hits from his students when the latter can not control the target. I am very happy when we play together, especially when he AGAK me (attack me) or when we play MARA-MARA (fight with control, but using all the techniques). His facial expression will change and I can see that he is enjoying playing, he seems like a kid.

During my training with Master Eddie Velez, I asked him a lot of questions about his training before and his life.

I am sharing some part of our conversation and I hope that you will enjoy to know things about him and to appreciate him like the way I appreciated him. I was very happy to meet him, proud to practice hard with him and enjoy finding a new friend.

Jolivel: *Hi Eddie, please can you introduce yourself?*

Master Velez: I am Eduardo L. Velez, the youngest son of the late Grandmaster Teofilo Velez.

I was born on March 30, 1955 in Cebu City, Philippines. I am the fifth child of the late Grandmaster Teofilo Velez.

Jolivel: *Can you tell us when did you start to train in Balintawak Eskrima and who was your instructors?*

Master Velez: I started training on Balintawak Eskrima when I was 15 years old, in 1970. My instructors were my father Grandmaster Teofilo Velez, Grandmaster Atty. Jose Villasin, Grandmaster Anciong Bacon, my brother Grandmaster Chito Velez and Grandmaster Bobby Tabimina.

Jolivel: *How was the training*

method at this time?

Master Velez: The practice was made by grouping and was very hard and we were hitting each other very often. That's why we tried our best to make it faster. There were times when Grandmaster Anciong Bacon hit me at my head and caused blood to come out. The training with the old man was very rigid. The old Grandmaster Anciong Bacon told me that you will not be a good instructor if you can not experience swelling of blood in your body.

Jolivel: *Who made the grouping and why?*

Master Velez: The original who made the grouping was Grandmaster Atty. Jose Villasin.



He made the grouping so that the student can learn properly the different level of techniques before learning and going to the next level.

In Balintawak, we do not use "belt" to know our level. Then,



the grouping is like a belt.

Jolivel: *There was an exam to introduce the Balintawak group?*

Master Velez: (Eddie laughed) As long that you give drinks, you are welcome! Before, we were drinking beer before we practice. When we were a little drunk, we knew during our practice if the student had a good character or not. Then, we decide if we will accept him or not in our group.

As long as you reach the advance level, the hitting, snatching, Pok-Pok, pouching, pulling and "Mara-Mara" (Mara-Mara, is the level where you mix all the techniques that you learn, in a fight with control, but with hitting), that's the time they recognized you to become an instructor of Balintawak.

Jolivel: *Can you explain us a little the history of the Balintawak Eskrima?*

Master Velez: Balintawak Eskrima is a style of Filipino Martial Arts developed by Grandmaster Venancio "Anciong" Bacon in the 1950s. At this time, my father practiced with Grandmaster Atty. Jose Villasin and Grandmaster Anciong Bacon.

It was named after Cebu City's Balintawak Self Defense Club, where it was originally taught. In turn, the club took its name from the street of its location, Balintawak Street, where the original Balintawak masters trained.

Jolivel: *Who was your partner in training?*

Master Velez: My close partners were Grandmaster Bobby Taboada, Grandmaster Nick Elizar, Master Ernesto "Joe" Cavan, Master Dr. Evencio Marapao, Sr., Grandmaster Teofilo Roma Vilbar, Master Butch Sepulvida, Chief Master

Ramon Franco “Monie” Velez and Grandmaster Pacito “Chito” Velez my two elder brothers. We had rigid practice with each other, sharing techniques, reviewing the techniques that were taught by our instructors. We usually started our practice at 7 in the morning until late evening and we stop only when we eat and of course drinking wine was our main menu.

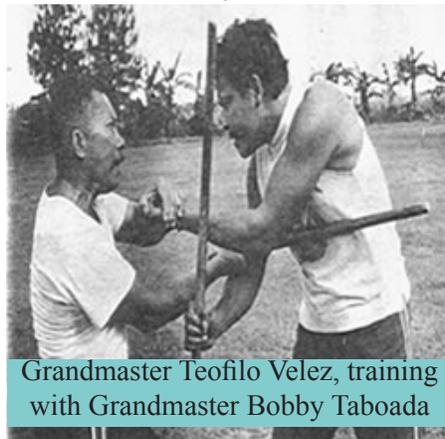
Jolivel: *I hear that you learn Balintawak directly from the late Grandmaster Anciong Bacon. Can you tell us how your training with him was?*

Master Velez: Yes, it’s true.

When I was an advanced student already, my father introduces me to Anciong Bacon, and paid the “old man” to train me (The term of “Old man” is a mark of respect to the Philippines). For one year I was training with him every morning. The training with Grandmaster Anciong Bacon was very hard, very painful. He will train you directly in random; it meant that you can hit him and that he can hit you. His hitting was not accidental because he liked that you feel the pain. It was very difficult. He will not teach you to be a trainer, but only to be a fighter. As I narrated

earlier, the old Grandmaster said that you will not be a good instructor if you will not experience bleeding from cuts in your body. Grandmaster Anciong Bacon was like a father to me, humble, meek, silent type person and he gave me training religiously and from the heart. I remembered one incident when I tried to apply secretly to surprise him, but to no avail. When I applied the technique to hit him, I was surprised because he quickly applied a counter technique and hit me at my forehead. And blood started to drip which resulted to a 5 stitches.

Jolivel: *And about your father, Grandmaster Teofilo Velez?*



Master Velez: My father was a very good teacher. Many eskrimadors came to train with him and some asked for an instructor’s certificate. My father did not teach for the money. It was only to have a group with good relationship and with loyalty. Every time there was a student who can afford to pay for the training, my father will send him directly to Grandmaster Bacon, to help the old man who did not have lots of money at that time. My father helped a lot in the promotion of Balintawak. My father as I remembered, he trained students on semi real. I also experienced bleeding in my body especially in my eyebrow, nose,

and in my mouth. I can recall one incident with my father, when we had an argument with one of my sister. My father tried to intervene and he tried to hold me, and maybe it was an instinct of a martial artist to react quickly and tried to block his hand when he tried to hold me. But I did not know what happened, or what he did, but he lifted me up and threw me on the floor.

Jolivel: *Who give you the title of Master in Balintawak?*

Master Velez: I got the Chief Master Instructor degree from my brother Grandmaster Chito Velez and from all the members of our newly organized group WOTBAG, together with President Master Dr. Ben Morapao, Sr. and Vice President Master Ernesto “Joe” Cavan.

Jolivel: *Actually for you, the Balintawak system is still for fighting or a sport or just an art?*

Master Velez: Before, the Balintawak Eskrima was for fighting. We were a little “bad guys” and like to fight and compare our ability in stick-fighting, but now we are training the student for self defense purposes only.

Jolivel: *Now, some of your old friends of Balintawak make their own system or group, but still with a big respect for the Balintawak, Grandmaster Bacon and Grandmaster Teofilo velez. Are you still in relation with some of them?*

Master Velez: Yes, after the death of my father, Grandmaster Teofilo Velez, some students made their own group, like Grandmaster Bobby Taboada, Grandmaster Nene Gabucayan, Grandmaster Nick Elizar, Grandmaster Teofilo Roma Vilbar and Grandmaster Bobby Tabimina and promoted Balintawak in America and every where in the world. But we are

BALINTAWAK



all the same; we are Balintawak Eskrimadors.

Jolivel: *Some foreigners come from far away to learn Balintawak. What do you think about it?*

Master Velez: The foreigners who come to Cebu to practice and to learn Balintawak style is not a joke. They spend a big amount of money to learn and to be trained properly. The learning of the foreigners will depend on the instructors' capabilities.

Jolivel: *And about your French student, what are your advices?*

Master Velez: I meet my French student, Fabien through Nick Elizar who introduced him to me. When I saw him, he was very quick, very fast already. That was why I was proud of him, and want-

ed to teach him and to share some of my techniques. I was so happy that he learned very fast and was very interested to practice with me regularly so he will not lose time. My advices to him were only to make him good and to always stay a humble man.

Jolivel: *The WOTBAG is born 2 years ago already with the help of Oliver. Can you tell us who is Oliver and the signification of WOTBAG?*

Master Velez: Master Oliver G. Mag-uyon is an old Balintawak practitioner. He started practicing at the age of nine. His first instructor was Grandmaster Bobby Taboada. The WOTBAG was formed with the help of members abroad and Master Oliver G. Mag-

uyon who did the paperworks. He is now one of our active instructors in the club. The signification of WOTBAG is "World Original Teovel's Balintawak Arnis Group" and is initially composed of the three Velez's brothers and some old Balintawak practitioners.

Jolivel: *What is your wish about the Balintawak and the WOTBAG?*

Master Velez: My wish for our group is to be united and respect each other so that the Balintawak and the WOTBAG will always stand strong and will exist forever.

Jolivel: Maraming Salamat Po, Master Eddie, for your sincerity in your teaching, your friendship and for all your advices during ours training.



After the training with Master Eddy Velez and Master Oliver



During the Christmas Party of the World Nickelstick Eskrima Club (December 2009)

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