

ARNIS IN THE LAND OF JIU-JITSU AND CAPOEIRA



Master Dada Inocalla

Arnis
Maharaja
Espino Martial Arts

ARNIS K



Like the art that he has been teaching for decades, Mr. Herbert Villafria Inocalla, more popularly known in Brazil as Master (or *Mestre* in Portuguese) Dada, is your unassuming, soft-spoken uncle or neighbor who, given the right moment, transforms into a grizzled warrior with swift and accurate movements that belie his age.

Master Dada, who hails from Labo, Camarines Norte in eastern Philippines, is the progenitor of Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) in Brazil, a country known for its love of martial arts, perhaps second only to football, and which has produced numerous champions in the UFC/MMA.

The Philippine Embassy visited the respected “*punong guro*” in his gym, *Academia Magka-Isa* in Asa Norte (North Wing), Brasilia for an interview.

Philippine Embassy: In your website, it was mentioned that you travelled to many countries to give lectures on spirituality and quality of life. When did you arrive in Brazil and why did you decide to stay?

Master Dada: When I was studying in Mapua (in Manila), I started doing yoga and then decided to become a monk like my brother. So I went to India and Nepal to train. But I already had a black belt in martial arts, having trained with the

Philippine master Orlando Gonzales. Then I went to Europe and later to Argentina as (Ananda Marga) monk. I stayed in Argentina for a while. A Brazilian met me there and invited me to come to Brazil. I arrived in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1974. I liked the Brazilians, they were friendly. Having met my wife in Brazil, I left the life of a monk and settled in Brasilia in 1976. I set up my martial arts gym and called it “*Magka-Isa*,” which means to unite the people, to unite the mind and body, the emotions and the spirit, to become one.

How was it like during your first years in Brazil in terms of living conditions and your establishment of an FMA school? What was the first reaction of Brazilians to FMA?

To earn a living, I taught karate les-

sons to Brazilians. There were very few schools in Karate in Brasilia then. I started with Karate and Tai-ichi, I was into Japanese and Chinese cultures but decided to teach *Arnis* after meeting with Grandmaster (Remy) Presas in Canada. Then I had three French students in karate whom I asked to help me put up my own academy (gym). The Brazilians knew nothing about FMA. It started slowly. Then the number of students gradually increased until I had to give classes day and night.

I started giving FMA lessons to a few students because they were not “mature” yet and reserved the actual scrimmages to those with higher belts. I also manufactured my own equipment, some were brought in from the Philippines, to ensure and improve the protection of students during classes. We adjust so as not to injure the students and lose them





from enrolling in the gym in the process.

Jiu-jitsu and Capoeira are very popular in Brazil. How do you persuade the Brazilians to study FMA?

FMA is complementary; it can go well with other disciplines. I also talk to the Brazilians about reality. For example, as I observe, jiu-jitsu creates muscle memory to grab then to bring the opponent to the ground. I tell them this is good in the school and in the ring, but not in the street. There have been many jiu-jitsu practitioners who got killed by robbers. I personally know someone who is a jiu-jitsu master but became wheelchair-bound because he fought with thieves and one of them shot him with a gun. I tell them, street fight is “hit and run.” Like the Filipino way, they have to think always that their opponents

have blade in their hands. The Filipino way is survival. You have to think that way so you do not become a victim in the street because you spend a lot of time in the streets.

When we teach FMA to Brazilians, it is a holistic approach. We train the mind and the body. We have to balance all of the

facets within the human being. We help the students build self-confidence. We help them gain courage and destroy the “fear culture.” Fear causes problems to our kidneys; worry affects the stomach; and sadness the lungs. So there is a therapeutic value in positive emotions -you yourself could create your poison or your medicine. Your strongest enemy is within yourself.

The FMA we teach has a simple and adaptable dynamic, so that it serves both for weak people, and very weak, and for the strong and very strong people. We have students young and old, male and female. FMA is even perfect for self-defense, it is simple and efficient, since with little practice time you can already get an idea of how to defend yourself. We aim to train the inner side, it is not to forget the physical side, but to teach the person how to confront their fears, their lack of coordi-

ination, mental laziness, weaknesses and internal enemies that we all have.

We also tell them that if they could avoid violence, that is the first and best option. So we teach them the magic words “Sorry,” “Thank you,” “Please,” so that the chance of getting into a fight is minimized.

How many FMA schools are there in Brazil? Where do the Brazilians who teach FMA get their training?

In Rio Grande do Sul, we have almost 15 schools (Porto Alegre, Santa Maria, Caixas, Gramado, Canela, etc.). Rio de Janeiro has two schools, São Paulo about 10. These are martial arts schools which integrate teaching FMA: for example, they have been teaching jiu-jitsu then they offer a separate class for FMA. Now there are also schools in Brazil that teach other systems of FMA like Pekiti Tirsia Kali. Usually, other Brazilian instructors (who teach other disciplines) would approach us to give seminars in their cities or to train them to teach FMA in their schools.

In your estimate, how many Brazilians are now (active) FMA practitioners?

There could be about 1,000 FMA students/practitioners in Brazil. Some Brazilians are now interested





with FMA because of Hollywood movies and TV shows that featured FMA. The trend is growing so we expect more people, not only in Brazil, to take up FMA.

You found your wife here and raised your family. Any FMA practitioners in your family?

I have two kids. They started learning at an early age but I told them that they have to secure their college education first. One of them, Ganesh, studied International Relations.

You use Filipino words with your students. Is this a common practice among FMA schools outside the Philippines?

We are multicultural, we have Spanish and English words, among others, plus the dialects. So I decided to go back to our own, official language and used it in teaching my students. By being familiar with some Tagalog words, the students become curious and study other words and phrases like “*Magandang umaga po.*” They begin to study about the Philippines beyond FMA. We promote not only the martial arts but the

tradition, culture and tourism of the Philippines.

We also incorporated “Baybayin” which makes them even more curious and treat the script as an art form. They know that it is an ancient Filipino alphabet and some of them say it is even easier to learn than the Japanese or Chinese alphabet.

How often do you go around giving seminars all over Brazil? Any invitations from military organizations in Brazil?

Majority of our seminars and demonstrations are for military organizations in Brazil like the Presidential Guard, *Força Nacional*, Federal Police, jail guards, civilian police, army, etc. and their families. We do not tell them that we are better than Brazilian martial arts or whatever discipline they were trained in but we tell them that the street is different. FMA is very practical and efficient in the streets. They like FMA and they become curious.

Brazilian policemen have no training against knives and similar weapons. One of our students who is a policeman asked his col-

leagues if they want to be trained in Hapkido or in knife techniques. The unanimous response was knife training. The fight in the academy is different from the fight in the ring and they are both different from the fight in the streets. Brazil has no “blade culture.” Many Brazilians die each year from kitchen knife. If you know how to use and defend against knives and sticks, it is a great equalizer, you are already secure.

The Brazilians saw the simplicity and effectiveness of FMA. They also like the direct movements of FMA in close-quarter combats. FMA increases or speeds up the reflexes.

What is your opinion on why there is practically no FMA practitioner in MMA?

FMA is already “mixed martial arts” in itself. Chris Weidman who defeated the legendary Brazilian champion Anderson Silva practiced FMA. Eliminating the hands and the legs are common in FMA so it was not surprising when Weidman broke Silva’s leg.

(Note: Former UFC Champion

Chris Weidman trains under Ray Longo who trained under the famous Filipino-American master Dan Inosanto.)

Why is FMA very popular in Hollywood action movies? Speaking of which, you and your brother Shishir also acted in movies. Can you share to us these experiences?

It is simple and effective, with empty hands or with weapons. You can see FMA in movies like 300, the Bourne series, The Hunted, Stargate Atlantis, Resident Evil, Blade, Kick Ass, Deadpool, the TV show Arrow, etc. Even Korean films are now using FMA and the *karambit* knife.

My brother Shishir, who also teaches FMA in Canada, appeared in many movies in Hollywood: in the MacGyver series, he also doubled for Ernie Reyes, Jr. His biggest break was playing the role of Michelangelo of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (in 1992). Through FMA, I was also able to act in a Brazilian movie entitled "Ratão." During the audition they asked me if I could use the bamboo poles as weapon. I said yes and showed them. But I told them it is impractical because the poles are too long so I gave a demonstration of



Sinawali (the signature double-stick of Arnis) and they loved it. The movie won first place in Gramado and second place in Brasilia.

What is the future of FMA in Brazil?

The future of FMA in Brazil is bright. Just last month, my brother and I travelled a lot around Brazil to do seminars, trainings and belt examinations. But it is good because we complement the existing martial arts of the Brazilians. At the same time, we promote the Philippine culture and tourism. Every year, we send the Brazilian students to the Philippines. In the future, we plan to include in the

tour FMA students from the U.S. and Canada.

There are now many books on FMA by Brazilian authors, some of them are students of this *Academia*. Some Brazilian self-defense books also feature FMA.

My brother Shishir and I are also working towards making FMA an Olympic sport. This will be the Philippines' contribution to the Olympics.

By the way, if you don't mind, how old are you now?

I'm 65 yrs old.

Note: Master Dada may have also helped in the passing of the law on Arnis. In June 2009, he met with then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo during her Official Visit to Brazil and discussed the Filipino Martial Arts. On 11 December 2009, President Arroyo signed into law Republic Act No. 9850, AN ACT DECLARING ARNIS AS THE NATIONAL MARTIAL ART AND SPORT OF THE PHILIPPINES.

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