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THE MINANGKABAU TIGER

JOHNNY SILMON INTRODUCES GURU EDUARDO ST PANDUKO, A MINANGKABAU SUMATRAN WHO IS DRAWING BACK THE VEIL OF SECRECY THAT PERMEATES THE WORLD OF SILAT.

The Sumatran tiger, the smallest of all the tiger sub-species is a highly endangered cat that lives deep in the thick jungles and also high in the mountain forests of the diverse equatorial island, Sumatra. However, there also exists another endangered species there - humans in this instance - that, ever-so-slowly are losing their culture and identity

to the Western influence of technology and industrialisation...

The human group that I am referring to are the Minangkabau - a fiercely proud tribe who live scattered predominantly around the west of the island, with one of their main centres being the highland town of Bukittinggi. Their culture is colourful and diverse - full of ceremonies, festivals and

performing arts. One of the 'jewels in their crown' are the martial arts which play a hugely important role in keeping their traditions alive - however, by no means are these fighting arts obsolete or useless. For those who have the eyes to see, Minangkabau fighting arts are a sophisticated method of close combat - you just need to have the right keys to unlock them and train in the right way in order to bring out all of the necessary attributes and responses. There have been a number of known exponents of the Minangkabau fighting arts, probably the best known among them in the UK is Guru Richard DeBordes, who has done so much good work over the years to promote Harimau Silat (Silek in Sumatran), one of the major styles from the region. There are also many little known teachers of these rare Indonesian combat methods, and it was one such teacher, who not only teaches Minangkabau Silek but who is also a real historian



and by the age of sixteen got his first black belt, however he badly broke his hip bone during an accident which specialists said would keep him immobile for about six months. His father sent him to his village, on the shores of Lake Maninjau, close to his home to get treatment from the local Shaman who, with use of special herbs, vigorous daily massages and some other old methods, treated Ed's fractured hip. Within three months he was up and about, relieved he was able to walk. A short time after his initial rehab he began his training again, during which time his uncle asked him about his Kung Fu, stating that he was overlooking the effectiveness of his native martial heritage. What started with some light hearted banter turned into something of a sparring match. Suffice to say, Ed lost badly to the old man, unable to penetrate his defence, and often hit by a barrage of strikes coming from strange and unpredictable angles.

travelling to different areas of this huge archipelago country, funding his travels by singing on buses with his guitar. He met many teachers and was exposed to many styles, coming to the conclusion that all Silat styles - certainly the older ones - probably came from one original, linked in as far back as Alexander the Great. Ed learnt well over ten different styles and discovered these often, originally, had four foundational movements and never had names - they came later on, being influenced or named according to areas these old teachers lived in, such as Cimande, which is a place, or Monyet, which is the monkey. It was often as simple a case as styles having names or different jurus or movements because having an original aliran (style) was a good way to open a padepokan (school) and make extra money - nothing at all very mystical when you see it from a logical point of view! Too often nowadays we hear of this or that 'secret juru' when in fact there really aren't any. [And for those who tell you there are, they are lying and trying to rip you off!] Movement is movement and there is nothing secret about it, and Ed found this out. He called his style Silek Tuo (Old Silat) as many teachers from Minang do because the true meaning of it was in line with the original Silat styles - as I have said, names came later on, and evolved into different specialities, whether ground fighting, striking etc...



of his native fighting arts, whom I first met seven years ago during a trip to 'Indo', and recently connected with again.

Guru Edwardo St Panduko was born in Bukittinggi in 1973 to parents of pure Minangkabau blood. During his time in primary school he learnt Kung Fu from his brother. Then, once he entered into high school he became a member of the local Kung Fu school. At that time, and as is still the case for the most part, Indonesians were not interested so much in their own native martial arts, but more influenced by Kung Fu - made popular by Bruce Lee and the Hong Kong martial arts film industry. Ed excelled

That year of 1989 was a huge turning point for Ed, giving up Kung Fu altogether to focus on his own native Minangkabau martial heritage. His uncle began teaching him his style, called Silek Balam, and Ed himself sought out other teachers in the areas surrounding Lake Maninjau. He was surprised at just how many teachers he found and he took time learning and absorbing as much about Minang Silek as he could. As he trained and sat listening to these old masters, he noted a particular vein that seemed to run through all of their stories, and he decided he needed to find the truth of the origins of Silat. By the year 1995 he began

Silek Tuo is a martial art system or philosophy, more than a particular style, that called to answer the challenge of nature - in other words to cause you to respond whatever the given situation - so it is quite possible that it



could look somewhat different each time it was used. Guru Ed often says that if he has five students, for example, they will all move differently because it is dependent on their body structure, intelligence and understanding. In the way Ed teaches his Silek Tuo he focuses on the real root basics of evasion and counter, because he says everyone has that instinct to defend, to attack and to be safe. Once you have learnt the basic gelek or twisting motion, which is both evasion and attack and then the induak, which is a four movement sequence that again has both attack and defence components, it is then up to the individual to train it often and develop their own style because, as Ed says, "everyone can be a master." This process takes a lot of time and effort however, and later on during the students' journey, there would be training performed in dark places in order to heighten and develop the senses and instinct as well as training on slippery surfaces to develop balance, sensitivity and proprioception. In days of old this slippery training would be performed on rocks in rivers but there were often too many head injuries and broken bones, so Ed himself uses a washing detergent on the floor to get the desired effect. The more I speak to Ed the more I can understand Silek Tuo does have structure yet is free from real restrictions, giving you the ability to do what is natural for you because, let's be honest,

a sixteen stone man has no real reason to drop down into a traditional depok or sempok posture - if they want to have healthy knees that is - whereas for a nine stone Indonesian man who has hyper-mobility of the lower back as well as being used to squatting in the traditional jonkok posture, these low postures are nothing!

The focus of Silek Tuo training is always on movement and thought as one, as the ideal because, in that moment of confrontation there should be no thought of movement - it should automatically be there and the right tools should be expressed based on instinct and reaction. Interestingly, there are no set jurus in Silek Tuo yet it is perfectly okay to develop them for yourself if that helps you to progress. Guru Ed has also said that observing nature, especially animal characteristics, is a great way to also develop your own style and this is exactly what so many of the masters of old did... They were no different to us today, except they perhaps had more time to observe nature and draw inspiration from it.

There seems to be so much mysticism surrounding martial arts, and especially Silat - shrouded in occult, in religion and in secrecy. I won't deny the fact that these things exist and are in fact deeply entwined within a lot of these styles, however, when



the moment comes down to it, when its man-versus-man in combat, these things pale into insignificance and all that's important is having the tools and attributes, both physical and mental that can get you out of sticky situation. Silek Tuo is different to most Silat in the way it is trained, and probably will take longer to master, but it seems to me to allow individuals a chance to really explore as well as develop a personal expression, and that can't be a bad thing. During the writing of this Ed, once again, has been travelling - this time to West Java to connect with a number of teachers in order to further his own understanding and experience. In future articles I will get down to certain specific training elements and principles that Ed teaches, so look out for them...

There is a limited opportunity for individuals to go and train with Ed out in Sumatra. Feel free to drop me an e-mail at Johnny@reelcombat.com for information

JOHNNY SILMON