

LAMECO ESKRIMA

THE LEGACY OF EDGAR SULITE



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CHAPTER 2

TRAINING WITH MASTERS OF OZAMIS CITY, MINDANAO

GM Jose Diaz Caballero and De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal

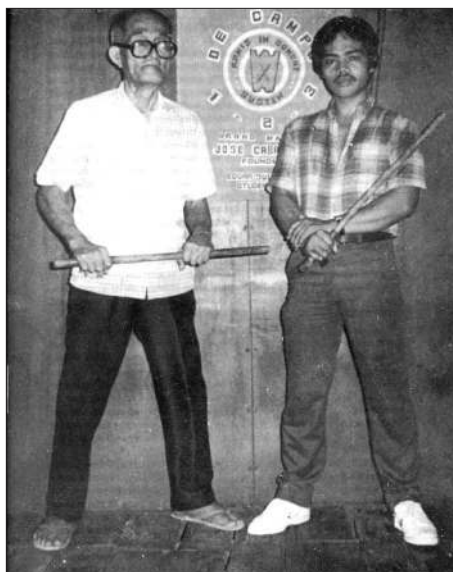
Punong Guro Sulite told me many times that even though he began his training under his father and his eldest brother (in his father's absence), his first real "formal" training in Eskrima came from Jose D. Caballero in the De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal system. Mang Caballero and his system were absolutely essential to the future creation, founding, and eventual worldwide popularity of Lameco Eskrima.

The views of Jose Caballero regarding fighting were simply this: you are only as effective in fighting as you are in training. You will fight the way you train; hence, one of his favorite sayings: "Suffer during training, not during a fight." Simply put, if you fight with weakness and compromise, it is because you have trained with weakness and compromise, and so, to alleviate this, you must remove both elements, and allow yourself to train as you would expect to fight. Permit your training to brush up against reality. Mang Caballero never allowed his students to rest on their haunches while training in De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal. He would push them until their hands bled from striking so much with their *garotes*. He expected students to improve after their first tries, one hard strike behind another, all done with full intention for two or three hours straight, without being given a chance to rest.

De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal is truly combat effective, having been created to win fights and nothing more. It is definitely one of the most effective systems in which I have had the privilege to train, as its foundation is anchored in reality and governed by combative truth. Cause and effect seem to dictate response and counter response as opposed to some orchestra of speculation which may or may not ever come to pass. You are truly effective only when you are in the moment, as it were, on any given day. Punong Guro Sulite used to say: "An ounce of reality is worth a pound of speculation." In other words, combative truth speaks loudest when based on actual experience and rings more valid than arts whose techniques are based on mere speculation.



GM Jose D. Caballero



GM Jose D. Caballero and Edgar G. Sulite posing in front of the De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal Banner which Edgar had made and presented to his teacher. The garote which Jose D. Caballero is holding in this photo is now in the authors private collection.

Nong Otek, as Manong Caballero was known to his family and closest friends, formed De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal in 1925. It is based on his observations of local masters in Barrio Ibo, Toledo City, Cebu, as they would “play” with one another with sticks, knives, and swords during local fiestas, duels, and challenge matches. Since Mang Caballero didn’t have formal instruction, he would go to tournaments, watch street fights evolve, and observe challenges played out, sometimes to the death, during his childhood and adolescence. The techniques of De Campo are based on the actions and reactions which Caballero saw in these fights, and he would teach himself to duplicate their movements. Even as a young man, he noticed the smallest curiosities while these masters fought, and he made mental note as they were revealed to him.

One of the things that he noticed right away, Edgar told us, was that, when the matches would start, both fighters typically walked around each other, watching the other’s movements, analyzing

and waiting for the other to strike first. Sometimes there would be no action at all for the first minute or so of the fight, and Nong Otek saw a lot of advantage in acting to the contrary. So, he established a series of three-second rules for initiating a fight. He usually waited for his opponent to strike first, as he was a counter fighter by nature. However, at the start of the fight, he counted to three, and if his opponent was not ready and had not thrown his first strike within three seconds, then Nong Otek launched his own attack with lightning speed and with strong purpose, catching his opponent by surprise and either break his head or his hand: the two primary targets in De Campo. As his opponent reacted to the damage inflicted, Nong Otek would back just outside of his reach, to see if the opponent could continue or not, but always at the ready to counter attack should the fight continue. In most cases, the fight would be over in mere seconds as few of his opponents could recover and continue fighting, thereby accepting defeat.

Nong Otek would constantly get into trouble as a young boy because he never made it to school on time. As he walked to school, he would see a stick laying on the ground, cut a piece of rattan out of a stalk, or else break a tree branch hanging down low. He just could not resist the temptation to practice Eskrima, resulting in his losing track of time and making him late for school, if he made it there at all. The young Jose Caballero used to get much grief from his father since he wanted only the best for his son and thought education was a necessity that would give him a chance to lift himself out of poverty one day and have a better life than that

of his father. However, young Jose had other interests and fighting was at the top of the list. In 1925, when he was eighteen years old, Caballero formally formed, founded, and named his own system, “De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal Combat Arnis,” and started fighting in tournaments and playing with local masters at fiestas. Based on his successes or failures in these matches, he would update and expand his system appropriately.

Nong Otek always sought to strike two primary targets: the head and the hands. These essential targets were both simple and effective because one or the other would always be made available to him during a match. Nong Otek felt there was an additional advantage to striking to the hands in training sessions: it really developed a high sense of awareness and accuracy, which involved location and relocation principles while busy perceiving a moving threat. He often said the hands were faster, three times smaller, and had four times the mobility of the head; so, if you could locate and strike the hands at will in real-time speed, then you would have no problem striking the head, with all of its restricting limitations of movement. He would go on to explain that if you had problems locating and hitting the hands in a fight, you should instead target the elbows, saying: “If you find the weapon hand hard to hit, target the elbows since they travel within a much narrower radius.” In this way, he looked at things others made difficult and make them simple and achievable.

I have to admit that it is the secondary targets of Manong Caballero which peak my interest the most. They are, in my opinion, nothing short of absolutely brilliant! There were times when Caballero could not hit the head or hands, and so he would, out of necessity, choose to strike at less than ideal targets in order to manufacture opportunity where none readily existed. In utilizing these more painful secondary targets, a distraction was created and, once a reaction was committed to by his opponent, he could then easily break the head of his opponent with finality and claim victory.

In utilizing these secondary targets, the intent was to strike to “maim” or “injure” the opponent. In doing this, Manong Caballero would use the first inch or so of the tip of his *garote* to inflict painful yet “less-than-lethal” wounds. By using the first inch or so of the *garote*, the very edge of the tip, he could choose to create a distraction by breaking the smaller bones of the opponent’s hand, the fingers, thumb, wrist, tip of the elbow, or knock out the knee cap, break and knock the bridge of the nose loose from the face, tear off a piece of an ear, tear off a lip, or tear chunks of tissue from either the forearm or biceps. I think any of these secondary targets more than qualify as a major distraction! Imagine seeing a piece of your biceps dangling from the tip of your opponent’s *garote* as he stands before you awaiting an opportunity to break your head and bring you to the ground in agonizing pain, while securing your defeat and his victory.

If a more serious outcome were sought with intent to produce “lethal” results, Nong Otek would utilize the upper six inches of the *garrote*, targeting the opponent’s temples to – as Manong Caballero would say – “Strike through the eyes.” By striking this far up the *garote*, even striking the hand or wrist can have a devastating effect, more than enough to distract and create an opportunity to strike and break the opponent’s skull. Regardless of whether one chooses to use the tip or the upper six inches of the *garote* to strike the intended target, precision

and intent are required. “Every strike that you throw has to be able to break the head of your opponent, or you should not throw a strike at all,” Caballero warned, “as a strike thrown in weakness and without intention can only invite defeat from a skilled and determined enemy.”

I think it also important to note that, when Manong Caballero fought, he did not look directly at the weapon hand or the head of his opponent. Instead, he used his peripheral vision and would pick a spot located just above the shoulder of the weapon-holding hand, almost as if he were looking off into the distance. By doing this, he would say that he could notice even the slightest movement of his opponent’s weapon. He would explain that peripheral vision creates an appearance that the opponent’s strikes are slower than they really are, allowing you to perceive the threat much more quickly because you are reacting to general movement as opposed to specific movement. By using his peripheral vision, Nong Otek could follow the weapon hand of his opponent wherever it went, and be able to hit it at will with power and focus.

Jose Caballero believed that when an opportunity revealed itself in a fight, it was split equally between you and your opponent. As such, the first one of you to recognize it and take advantage of it will gain the advantage. He used to warn his students that there were no guarantees in combat, only opportunities. Either you take advantage of those fleeting opportunities at the very moment they are presented, or you hesitate, and the same opportunity can be seized by your opponent to break your head. In other words, your failure to act in the moment can cost you the match or your life. Caballero also warned his students not to wait for the opportunity they desired but instead to take the first opportunity that presented itself, and work off of that advantage to end the fight. In any fight, very few opportunities will present themselves in any form, and if you allow even one to pass without seizing it, another may not come along at all; so take any and all opportunities and use them to your advantage. If you do not, your opponent will.

Caballero’s De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal system focused on only two weapon categories: *solo garote* (single stick) and *doble garote* (double sticks). It is said that he fought challenges against opponents brandishing knives, bolos, and swords, and still he maimed, defeated, and sometimes killed them by using only medium weight rattan sticks. Caballero was the undefeated *juego todo* (“anything goes”) champion of his region, which gained him much notoriety and respect from his fellow *eskrimadors*. He would often go to tournaments during local fiestas and place his name on the list of fighters, only to find many who had previously enlisted to fight, rushing to withdraw their names for fear of fighting him. Caballero would then withdraw his own name and watch the other fighters run back to the table to get back on the list. Nong Otek was fond of doing this, for no other reason than just to gauge the response. He enjoyed the profound respect of his peers as well as from all of the battle-hardened *eskrimadors* in his region. In fact, sometimes, when he would walk down the road, people crossed to the other side to greet him out of respect, leaving Caballero to ask: “When are we going to play?” To which they would respond: “Joe, mine is only for playing. Yours is for killing. So, you and I will not be playing

Certificate of Authenticity

Issued to

DAVE GOULD

Grandmaster Jose D. Caballero memorabilia items:

One wooden bolo
Two sticks
Three wooden knives

This certifies that the memorabilia items are original handcraft of the late Grandmaster Jose D. Caballero.

Notes:

Stick one was used during the photo session with PG Edgar Sulite and can be seen in his book "Masters of Arnis, Kali and Eskrima".
Stick two was used while sparring with his number one protégé Ireneo "Eric" Olavides.

Authenticated by:

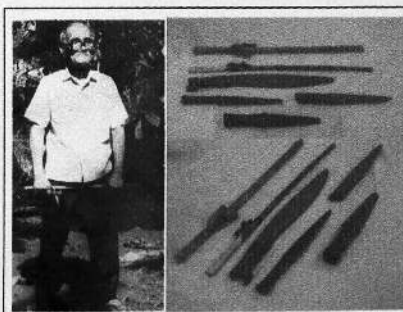
Amparo Lebumfacil Caballero

Amparo Lebumfacil Caballero

Eric Olavides

Edilberta Caballero Liawao

Edilberta Caballero Liawao



Certificate of Authenticity for several weapons in the authors private collection which belonged too and were hand carved by GM Jose D. Caballero over 70 years ago. The certificate is signed by: Mrs. Amparo Lebumfacil Caballero, the widow of Manong Caballero, his Daughter, Edilberta Caballero Liawao and Manong Eric Olavides.

anytime soon." To which Nong Otek replied: "If yours is not for killing then why waste your time training?"

De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal is classified as a "largo-medio" (long to medium) range fighting system with close range implications. It has only seven strikes, three double stick patterns, no blocks, no hand contact between players, no disarms, no *punyos* (butt strikes), only three types of footwork, 10 striking groups, a plethora of group mixing, three finishing strikes, alertness training, and specialization of grouping/striking, and thousands of hours of sparring against single and multi-person scenarios. It is simply a system of a continuous series of hard destructive strikes, counter strikes, and strike combinations designed to work well against chaos and uncertainty, which are all too commonly found in a street fight as it dynamically evolves from second to second. Even though the system was designed to be most effective in the "medio-largo" range, it is also quite effective in the close range as well. Caballero said that he would shorten the path of his strike to accommodate the strengths of his system at that distance by drawing the *punyo* closer to his body while striking, thereby decreasing the radius of his strikes but not sacrificing his power or lightning-quick hand speed.

Caballero was a counter fighter by nature. When attacked, he would retreat to just within an inch of *largo* range while striking to break the hand of his opponent. Once the tip of his

opponent's weapon barely passed his nose, Caballero would immediately charge forward to strike his opponent's head. Anticipating a counter attack, Caballero would then retreat back into *largo* range, just outside of his opponent's reach; again waiting to attack whatever angle his opponent might counter with. Manong Caballero would say that the perfect fighting range was found "when you could feel the fibers of your opponent's stick brush up against your nose. At this range you cannot possibly get any closer to your opponent without being more in harm's way and you cannot possibly get any further away from your opponent without being found in deficit." The master would gauge the proper fighting distance based on these criteria and, on average, his fights were said to have lasted only three to five seconds each, before his opponent would be on the ground bleeding from the head, unable to continue.

Jose Caballero made his living for several decades traveling from island to island in the Philippines, challenging various masters to a fight for money, bringing along his father-in-law to act as his referee. He would go to an island and challenge the best fighter there, make side bets with the residents of the village, then fight and defeat his opponent. He then returned home to Barrio Ibo, Toledo City, Cebu, and lived off the profits made from the fight. When he ran low of money, once again he would be off to another island for another fight. Caballero



These were all hand carved by GM Jose D. Caballero circa 1940s and were all used often by him during his personal training. The second stick from the top was used by GM Caballero in the books: "Secrets of Arnis" and "Masters of Arnis, Kali and Eskrima" both authored by Edgar G. Sulite. The stick on top was used by both Manong Ireneo "Eric" Olavides and Edgar G. Sulite to spar against Manong Caballero during their private lessons with him at his home in Ozamis City, Mindanao, Philippines in De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal. The bolo and training knives were used by Manong Caballero in training. One of his students would feed him while holding these and he would work his counters with either solo garote or doble garote against a knife wielding or bolo wielding attacker.

did this until he got too old to fight for a living and was forced into teaching. That was when, after hearing of Caballero's reputation, a young and impressionable Edgar Sulite sought him out as a teacher.

From the onset it was quite difficult for Edgar to gain the confidence of the "old man," as Edgar would fondly refer to him. In fact, it would take one full year of "courting" him with much patience and determination, in addition to providing him with poultry and dairy products when Edgar had collected enough money to purchase such things. All of this was done in an honest attempt to convince the master of his sincere desire to be accepted as an earnest student seeking only combative knowledge and not presenting himself as a "spy" out to steal his secrets, as was the belief of old warriors back in the day.

In order to gain the confidence of Caballero, Edgar would go by his house almost every day and inquire if he could train with the "old man," yet day after day he would be denied and told to go away. When Edgar could get a small amount of money together he would buy small gifts of chicken, eggs, or milk and place these items on the doorstep of Caballero's house, as a good will gesture. He hoped these would gain him a small measure of influence with the very sought out and highly respected Eskrima master. Edgar's persistence and dedication were unwavering, and soon Caballero came to recognize this. After almost a year of this "courting" the "old man" gave in and accepted Edgar as a student of De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal, several months before Edgar's 18th birthday in 1975, and an odyssey began.

The problem from the beginning was that Jose Caballero felt that, if you had trained in any other system, the only goal you could possibly achieve by training under him was to "steal his secrets" and teach them to your group or clan. It was feared that one day those "secrets" might be used in combat against him or his best students. This was a common way of thinking among the "old warriors" of that time, and for good reason; at one point in time it was true. Indeed, many systems were violated in this manner during the turn of the 20th century when Caballero was raised, and the mistrust of anyone not of one's family or clan was quite common. Since Edgar was neither of the Caballero family nor of his clan, naturally, he was met initially with suspicion and was much scrutinized. However, Jose Caballero, by then feeble and old and not able to fight challenges for a living any longer, had little choice but to offer himself as a teacher to try and make a little money to help pay his bills and provide sustenance for his family.

Edgar told me several times that when he was learning De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal from Manong Caballero, it was the training itself he initially hated most because it was so demanding and challenging to him physically. But in only a short time he came to appreciate fully the combative value being laid at his feet by training in this system under such a great and experienced warrior. Because there are no blocks or disarms in De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal, and there are only two types of strikes (one to kill and one to maim), it was sometimes very difficult to train because you would repeat the same grouping and finishing strikes again and again, thousands of times per training session. That said, the results were highly effective, and that fact could not be argued.



The author posing with two of the hand carved garotes which belonged to GM Jose D. Caballero and are now in the authors private collection

Because training and sparring sessions were conducted without protective equipment, Edgar got hit thousands of times on the hands, wrists, and forearms, making each strike painful beyond belief. This is what forced him to further develop his hand evasions revealed in Caballero's well thought-out progression of *kaabtrik*, or "alertness" training. In *largo* range, even though the body and head are kept just out of the opponent's reach, the hands, wrists, and forearms can still be struck. In order to stay close enough to one's opponent to take advantage of opportunities as they revealed themselves during the fight, one had to master hand evasions for those times when one's opponent tried to target those extremities of the body.

At the earliest stages of their student-teacher relationship, Edgar felt that Caballero was being stingy with his teachings as he kept forcing Edgar to repeat the same thing every time. What he eventually came to understand was that Caballero was trying to get him to master the basics against

all situations and probable scenarios, and to learn all that each had to offer in street combat. To learn them so well, that he not only learned the strength of the technique, concept, or principle, but also gleaned the inherent weakness which was the opposite side of the strength itself. Only when he fully understood the weakness of what he did could he then assess fair value to the strength. Only then could he come to depend on it, as sometimes the weakest part of a technique proves to be greater than the strength, and, therefore, becomes ill-advised to use under certain conditions or circumstances. De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal became the confidence system of Edgar Sulite in regard to impact weapons, and every time he was forced to defend life and limb, fight a challenge, or spar, he reverted back to the lessons learned and combative abilities instilled during his time under the tutelage of Jose Caballero. In the words of Jose D. Caballero: "You train to live, not die."

De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal utilizes one hard strike thrown after another. You strike until your hand bleeds, and then you strike some more. Caballero's requirement was that you strike as hard and as fast as you could for 15 minutes without slowing or stopping. Then you did two minutes of hard aggressive footwork followed by 15 more minutes of striking without resting, continuously, for three hours a day. He would have you break small coconuts, hit tires, and the daily sparring was rough – no head gear or padding. The rules of training were such that, if the head were open, you were required to take the shot. The only way that you could truly protect your head and weapon hand was to constantly keep both just outside of your opponent's reach, all while staying highly aware of your opponent's every move and maintaining the ability to act



A closer look at two of the hand carved garotes which belonged to and were used by GM Jose D. Caballero.

on any additional opportunities as they reveal themselves to you in real-time, until the fight has been won. Another of GM Caballeros favorite sayings regarding this concept was: “Strike first and strike last, even when your opponent initiates the attack.” Even though his opponent might try to throw the initial strike, GM Caballero beat him to it and then strike last, as well, ending the fight to his advantage.

It got so bad at times during his training sessions that often Edgar, being absolutely exhausted, would pretend that he had to relieve himself just to be able to get away from the “old man’s” critical eyes for only a few minutes, so he could catch his breath enough to continue training. Edgar recalled GM Caballero thinking he had a faulty bladder because he needed to “relieve” himself so many times in a three-hour session. Edgar would excuse himself, head for the bushes, and, bent over, resting on his knees and catching his breath, he would think to himself: “Surely, this old man will be the death of me!” Trying to steal one more minute to recoup from his exhaustion, then came the words he hated to hear the most from the “old man”: “Gar! Back!”

Edgar went to the home of GM Caballero for training whether or not he had the money to do so, because he really wanted to train, and he hoped the “old man” might make an exception due to Edgar’s poverty. As he arrived at the house, GM Caballero would approach him and ask if he had any money. Edgar replied with a “yes” or “no,” depending on his circumstances. If the answer was “no,” GM Caballero went into his home and got his receipt book showing the receipt for the student who had just trained before Edgar, that day, and say: “You see? ‘So and

so' was just here, and he paid this much." Then he told Edgar that, without money, he would not be able to train today. Edgar always hung his head in disappointment, as he truly desired to train.

I remember a situation where Edgar told me that he did not have any money to pay and Manong Caballero refused to teach him for the day. He was told that, since he was there already, he should go into the back yard and train by himself, swinging his garote. GM Caballero went and sat on the porch with his back turned to Edgar and looked off into the distance. If Edgar began to relax in the execution of his strikes, the "old man" shouted, "More sound!" Although still sitting with his back turned, he was actively teaching Edgar, if only by audible sound. Edgar would then start striking his garote with gusto at the prospect of GM Caballero offering something more for his efforts. Manong Caballero used to demand that each strike which you threw in training had to have enough power to break the head of your opponent, or, he said, you should not throw the strike at all. If he did not hear the wind swishing across the tip of the garote as each strike cut the air with full intention, he would quickly say: "No sound!", "Wrong sound!", or "More sound!" He taught Edgar that, when his stick was silent, his capacity to fight was diminished.

It was hard training, but Punong Guro Edgar G. Sulite realized how blessed he was for being given the chance to train and learn from GM Caballero, and he valued their friendship and all that GM Caballero shared with him. It is funny because later Edgar told me he first thought GM Caballero to be his stingiest teacher because he taught so few techniques and made him repeat tens of thousands of times what he did teach him. Where some of Edgar's other Instructors overwhelmed him with techniques, sometimes showing him hundreds of different techniques per training session, even though Edgar said he walked away from those training sessions remembering only about 10 techniques if he were lucky and forgetting the rest. Yet, he remembered 100% of what he was required to do in each session with GM Caballero. Hence, one of Punong Guro Edgar G. Sulite's favorite sayings: "Repetition is the mother of all skills." This reference was made specifically regarding how GM Caballero taught his students, and what was required of each of those who trained under him in De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal.

When Edgar looked back on his previous training, he realized most of the things he had received from some of his other Masters, he did not truly master because he spent so little time evaluating each technique, concept, or principle to the point where he fully understood them. Whereas, GM Caballero forced him to truly master each strike, counter strike, and counter-to-counter strike as well as forcing him to verify each one every time they faced one another in hard sparring. By forcing Edgar to repeat those same strikes and combinations of strikes against an unexpected random attack or counter attack in real-time by literally hundreds of thousands of repetitions and countless hours of sparring, Edgar had no choice but to master the combative equation itself, the "art of fighting," if you will. He came to realize that GM Caballero was not the stingiest of his Teachers but rather the most generous because he cared enough to force Edgar, not to become a master of meaningless techniques and countless series of redundant drills, but rather to master combative movement and the fight itself.

De Campo Uno-Dos-Tres Orehenal is one of the five major influences of the Lameco Eskrima System, and, since the passing of GM Jose Diaz Caballero in 1987, the system has passed on to his number-one protégé; Master Ireneo L. Olavides, who resides, and can be contacted, in Cagayan do Oro, Mindanao, Philippines. For anyone who truly wants to connect with the true combative essence of Lameco Eskrima, it is essential to investigate further into De Campo 1-2-3 Orehenal. A few years ago, Mang Eric Olavides transferred full authority back to the Caballero family when he announced GM Manuel “Mawe” Caballero as the head of the system; and both Mang “Mawe” and his son can be reached in Toledo, Cebu, Philippines for training and further information regarding the system.

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