



by Guru Scott McQuaid

The year is 1942. The Japanese have invaded the Indonesian archipelago, they advance into West Sumatra and encounter some resistance from the Minangkabau people. The Minangkabau are a matrilineal tribe credited with the invention of Silat Pau, a deadly form which was used by the Jago, a semi mythic figure who would appear for assassinations and generally to make havoc for occupiers trying to take the Minang lands.

Minangkabau freedom fighters trained in various *Silek* (silat) systems and these rebels attacked the Japanese soldiers in small bands. Silat has been used in past wars by the Minangkabau to defend themselves from Chinese, Indian, Javanese and European invaders over the centuries. The Minangkabau silat techniques used against the Japanese were

tunga
,

rego

and

ganda

. This is a group of forms using fists, legs and elbows. The

Harimau

(tiger) style of Silek combined all these techniques as well as ground fighting which made them very deadly warriors on the battlefield.

Although the modern fire power of the Japanese army was too powerful for the locals and the Japanese took over the country, there were some freedom fighters in Indonesia that continued to fight Japanese occupation. In central Java a small band of rebels known as the *Harimau Berantai*

(chained tiger) clan, which was also the name of their silat, carried out covert night missions on

Japanese camps. The Harimau Berantai clan were weapon experts and they hid in the mountains. At nightfall they silently killed Japanese soldiers, much like the ninja assassins of ancient feudal Japan.

In the Philippines Kali silat practitioners used their stick fighting art to fight off Japanese invaders. The combined American-Filipino army was defeated in April 1942 and although American troops lead by captain Douglas MacArthur had pulled out of the Philippines, guerrilla resistance against the Japanese continued throughout the war. The uncaptured Filipino army units and communist insurgency continued the fight. One of the major points for operations was on Bataan on the island of Luzon and it is reported that Kali fighters attacked the army base on many occasions. Due to the huge number of islands in the Philippines the Japanese did not occupy them all and this allowed Filipinos to gather a resistance.



Almost all combat units fighting in World War II were trained in some form of martial art. In Israel

it was *Kapap* and *Krav Maga*. For the Soviet army, Russian *Sambo* was the basic form taught in infantry training for Soviet soldiers. For highly elite units such as the Spetsnaz, paratroopers and special forces had additional training in the art of

Systema

. Both the Imperial Japanese army and Navy trained their troops to know basic karate and Judo techniques. The French army trained frequently in

Savate

prior to the war. World War II was notorious along with World War I for wiping out much of the masters of Savate and Savate was almost lost. The United States army trained in boxing, wrestling, and bayonet techniques, however among the American special forces such as the Rangers and other espionage units such as saboteurs and spies extra training was given. Special forces and spies and saboteurs were taught basic Savate techniques by French instructors. The regular British infantry were taught boxing and wrestling along with bayonet training, but the SAS troops were taught

Defendu

, a martial art created by a British soldier who had traveled Asia and blended some of the techniques he had seen from the orient.

Martial arts has always played a significant role in wars, even the Spartan warriors in ancient Rome used Pankration the Greek art of combat on the battlefield. Samurai warriors would resort to Ju-Jitsu techniques once they were unarmed, and Indonesian Silat fighters have used bladed and hand to hand combat throughout their historic battles during the Srivijaya and Majapahit empires. No matter how advance the weapons become, eventually at some point a soldier will be stripped down to their bare essentials and unarmed combat will be their last line of defense. All physical combat starts by walking into it with your fists up.

Published in Irish Fighter magazine, 2014.