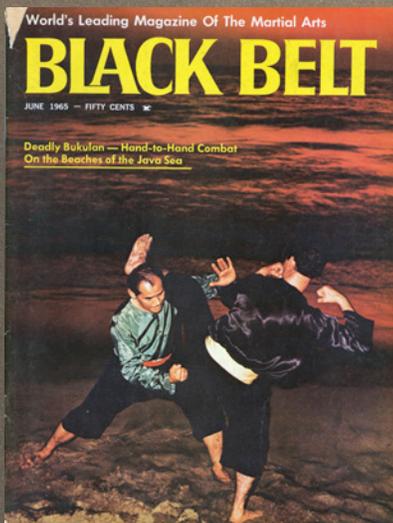


Pencak Silat

Techniques and History of
the Indonesian Martial Arts





This article originally appeared in the June 1965 issue of *Black Belt* magazine. The term *pentjak silat* was used in the article's text and is preserved in the original copy. It is an alternate spelling of the term *pencak silat*, which is a spelling more widely used in modern parlance. The 2013 presentation of this article uses the more modern term (*pencak silat*) in its title for the purpose of being more findable online. Despite the disparity, neither the use of "pencak silat" in the title nor the use of "pentjak silat" in the internal copy are misprints.

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The islands of Indonesia lie like the curved blade of a scimitar between the stretches of the Indian Ocean and the reaches of East Asia. Sumatra, Java, Bali, and a hundred other smaller islands, known in the days of exploration as the Spice Islands and in colonial times as the Dutch East Indies, string like a hump-backed dragon through thousands of miles of ocean, running from Singapore and the Malay Coast down to New Guinea and Australia.

These are lands of mountains and green jungles, the dark fragrant islands of Joseph Conrad and the home of the Balinese temple dancers. For many years they have been islands of violence, swept by the Japanese in World War II, racked by the struggle for independence from the Dutch and years of civil war. As though war bred a taste for war Indonesia's revolutionary strongman, Sukarno, having overcome his enemies at home is now looking for new

ones abroad. In recent years he has been launching guerilla bands and paratroopers into the jungles of next-door Malaysia, creating a situation that waits only the proper sequence of mistakes to become a full-scale war.

Racked by war, criss-crossed through history by Arab, Chinese and European traders, marauded by Chinese, Malay and Philippine pirates, it is not surprising that the people of these islands developed some effective methods of combat and self-defense.

But after systems of boxing, wrestling and weaponry were created they followed the Asian pattern and were eventually practiced not only for their practical uses but for the attainment of higher psychological ends. Thus the Indonesian fighting systems became Indonesian martial arts.

A recent issue of BLACK BELT carried a reader's query about a fighting system called "poekoelan," a term of Indonesian origin. Not long ago two Dutch-Indonesians living in the Los Angeles area, Paul de Thouars and Rudy Ter Linden, stopped by the office to talk about this art, which they call *bukulan* and in which they are experts.

Fighting Arts of Java

Paul and Rudy are both natives of the long, narrow island of Java. Borneo lies dead north two hundred miles across the Java Sea; around the right corner of Borneo lie the Philippines—around the left, Singapore



Bukulan master Paul de Vreis.

Judo and karate men bow to each other before a match or workout and boxers touch gloves — but before Indonesian bukulan men start a sparring session or a contest they go through this little dance: first they touch hands, then they go into a four-step stylized turnaround before facing each other and squaring off for the action. By turning their backs they indicate that this is a sporting encounter and that they respect each other's sportsmanship — and since this comes from the islands where music, dance and grace are a part of life it must be done with style. The colorful silk costumes do not indicate rank — they are the uniforms of local bukulan clubs.





and the South China Sea. Paul points out that there are many systems of fighting on Java and many more on the other islands, and that *bukulan* is a general term which covers them all. It does not refer to any particular style or technique.

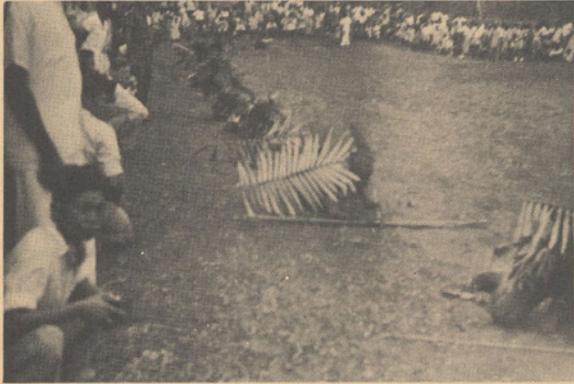
Also, *bukulan* is strictly an East-Java term; in the west the fighting styles are known collectively as *pentjak*, and in the midlands the word is *silat*—all mean the same.

The particular techniques described and demonstrated by Paul and Rudy consist not so much of grappling like judo or wrestling, but of squaring-off at a distance, like boxing or karate. Their own specialty, a system called *serak*, looks very much like Chinese fist and foot fighting, a sort of expanded boxing in which every part of the body is subject to be attacked and to be used for attack. Blows are delivered with the fist, with the palm, and with the open sword-hand, though the side-hand chop of *karate* (*shuto*) does not seem to be much used. The fighters stay close to the ground and deliver straight-legged kicks like the Chinese—the acrobatics of the Japanese and Korean karate-men is not much in evidence, although Rudy has a move in which he charges an opponent with the seven-foot staff (*toya*), jabs it into the ground and swings up like a pole-vaulter with a flying kick to the head.

Indonesian Combat Dancing

Like classical karate *serak* has *katas* (called *langkas* and *djurus*), formalized dance-like series of kicks, punches and blocks performed alone by the individual to develop reflexes and build habit patterns.

These forms, like the *katas* of karate, have a grace and beauty quite aside from their practical combat applications. If an observer were not aware of the deadly connotations of the moves he might think himself watching a performance of Indonesian dancing. As a matter of fact Rudy Ter Linden says that in the old days (and perhaps still today), matches between top *bukulan* men of different villages would be preceded by a dance called *kambangan*, or the Flower Dance. The Flower Dance, actually the formal exercises





New Guinea scrapbook — scenes from Paul and Rudy's service in the Dutch-Indonesian Army. (Opposite page, outside column, from the top): New Guinea drummers dressed in sarongs lead a holiday procession; Native warriors camouflaged with palm fronds putting on a show for holiday crowd; (bottom) Typical fishing-village families. Inside column: Paul and Rudy are in this jeep patrol of jungle villages; Off-duty recreation — swimming in a jungle river; Paul (standing 5th from left) and some of his comrades. This page, upper left: Rudy (left) with some of his buddies in full uniform on inspection day; A New Guinea jungle breakfast — coconut milk; Righthand column: Paul (top right) and Rudy (bottom left) with some of their exotic comrades in the Dutch-Indonesian Army on New Guinea.

of the fighting system, would be performed by the challenger to the slow music of the *kendang* drum.

Moving in a deep spring-legged crouch similar to the Chinese "Horse" position, Rudy gave an idea what the dance was like, firing eye-level elbow strikes into the palm of his hand; throwing swift glances all about while his hands and fingers darted out in jabs and blocks. Performed by a master the combat Flower Dance had all the beauty and precision traditionally associated with the dances of Southern Asia.

The challengee would watch the dancer carefully — if the forms were perfect and their execution sure he could back out of the match; if the dancer stumbled or made a mistake the drums would speed up and the

local hero would jump into the ring.

The *katas* of karate and the *long-kas* and *djurus* of Indonesia are perhaps the bridge between mere hand-to-hand combat and a true martial art: through the forms practitioners are led to practice the movements for their own sake rather than for any ulterior purpose.

In their younger days Paul and Rudy were tossed about in the storm of Indonesian life. Dutch-Indonesians, they were born of mixed parentage and grew up under Japan's occupation — Paul in the capital, Jakarta (then called Batavia) and Rudy in the city of Soerabaja.

Sukarno Takes Over

At the end of the Second World War, as these *bukulan* men tell it, the Japanese garrisons on Sumatra

surrendered their weapons and were placed in concentration camps by the Indonesians under Sukarno. With the Japanese behind wire and the Dutch gone since the early days of the war there was a vacuum of power — a vacuum Sukarno filled by arming his Indonesians with captured Japanese weapons. The Indonesians expressed their opinion of the Eurasian Dutch-Indonesians by rounding them up, men, women and children, and herding them into concentration camps too.

Paul, who was then 16 (today he's 33) spent 40 days in one of Sukarno's camps before he was released by a column of British troops come over from Malaya. At one point, according to him and Rudy, a Japanese infantry commander changed

his mind about surrendering to the Indonesians after he and his men were already in camp. So according to this story, he ordered his men over the wire and led them in a banzai charge fighting with nothing but sticks and judo to recover their captured guns. The commander then released the Dutch-Indonesians held nearby and awaited the arrival of the British or someone else he could surrender to properly.

After his release Paul went to Siam (now Thailand) to join his father and uncle, members of the Dutch-Indonesian Army who had been prisoners of war building a Burma railroad for the Japanese. Paul began *serak* under his uncle, Paul de Vreis, who today has a *bukulan* school in Amsterdam, Holland.

In Soerabaja meanwhile, 15-year-old Rudy had started *serak* under a teacher whose name he promised never to tell. The man is approaching seventy now, and may be dead, but Rudy still will not reveal his name.

Bukulan Comes to America

Paul and Rudy joined the Royal Dutch-Indonesian Army and were

stationed on New Guinea where they met and practiced together in *serak*. After their discharges they chose as Dutch citizens to go to Holland, and eventually to America. Paul works as a pump operator in a tube factory. Rudy used to be a plastic mixer but now that the two have decided to open a self-defense school he divides his time between teaching *bukulan* and assisting with the instruction at a nearby kung-fu school—thus underlining the close relation between the two arts.

The Indonesian art of self-defense is now being taught at Paul's home, 1136 North Dalton Avenue in Azusa, near Los Angeles. Sometime later this year another *serak* expert, Soejotnoh (many Indonesians have only one name) will come to the U.S. to teach for several months.

"*Serak*," as Rudy and Paul explain it, means "decoy" — decoy in the sense that one does not back off but moves in to an opponent, making oneself available for attack and relying on darting speed and reflexes to push the blow or kick aside and retaliate with a strike or a trip or both.

There are many other styles of Java *bukulan* — *petjut* (whip-style), *minna kabauw* (dance-style: "always moving, playing"), the classical styles of *tjemantik* and *tje bandar* ("good for women"), *si matjan* (the tiger-style), *suchi hati* (the "big-hearted" style—apparently based on real sucker punches), the Chinese styles of *cunto* (kung-fu) and *shantung*; *tji monjet* (the ape style), *klilap* (the "thunder" style, directed against nerve centers), and many others.

The use of weapons is also taught—besides the seven-foot staff *bukulan* men use *siku-siku* (a small fork), *bedok* (a curved knife) and the familiar Malay kris, the wavy-bladed short sword.

Ape Versus Tiger

Paul tells an interesting story about the ape style, *tji monjet*. In the old days a master of one of the *bukulan* styles, an Indonesian plantation owner, was quite severe with his wife, beating her whenever he thought she needed it which was often. Though the woman burned with resentment there was nothing she could do.



One afternoon she brought a load of wash down to the river and while she was beating it on the flat stones a large ape came out to feed on the opposite bank. The hot afternoon was droning by when suddenly a tiger leaped out of the woods and attacked the ape. While the woman sat fascinated on the far shore the ape picked up a stick and defended itself, eventually knocking the tiger so badly that it turned tail and ran off.

When she got home with the clothes her husband told her she had been gone too long and started to give her another beating. But she picked up a broom and did what she'd seen the ape do, and soon had her husband on the floor.

The *bukulan* master's anger turned to amazement, and instead of beating his wife he studied what she'd learned and eventually devised the ape style of Indonesian fighting.

The idea of basing self-defense techniques on the movements of animals is familiar to the Chinese martial arts, and in *serak* at least there is a strong dose of Chinese influence. *Serak*, one of the newer styles, was

devised by Mas Djut, a Sundanese who lived and taught in west Java around the turn of the century. One of his students was Paul's uncle, Paul de Vreis.

Mas Djut had been trained in *klilap*, the "thunder-clap" style of nerve-center strikes. Living near the water's edge he mixed with many Chinese fishermen and seamen, often sailing out with them in their sampans and trading techniques with seagoing kung-fu men. Eventually, out of *klilap*, Chinese kung-fu and his own inclinations he devised the system of *serak* which he then began to teach.

Supernormal Attainments

Mas Djut was more than an athlete and a fighting man—he was a *pendékar*, a "priest-master" who gained physical and mental power through fasting and meditation. According to Paul, who swears these things are true, the *pendékars*, Mas Djut included, could throw a punch at a standing plank many feet away and make it vibrate. Mas Djut (according to Paul) would go into a barnyard filled with chickens and

ask his students which one they wanted for dinner. When a likely hen was picked he would gesture toward it from across the yard — a good twenty feet distant — and it would collapse and flap its wings. Inspection showed it had been split down the middle.

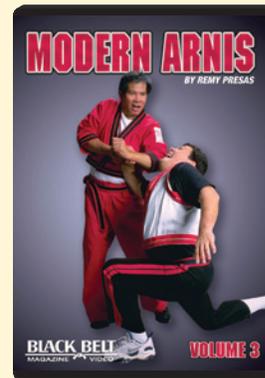
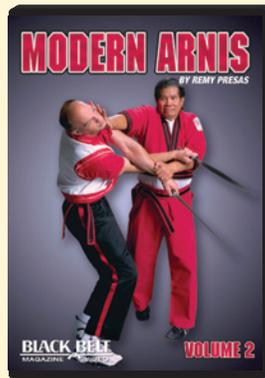
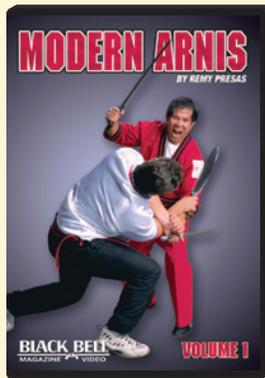
Paul says Mas Djut had developed such power that he could kill a massive water buffalo with a single punch in the forehead — a feat reminiscent of the Japanese karatemen who kill bulls. He had another faculty in common with the Japanese masters — the ability to sense and avoid an attack no matter where it came from or when. His students would creep up when he was sleeping in a hut and throw a stone at his stomach. From a sound sleep he could roll and avoid it.

Rudy and Paul aren't *pendékars* and don't claim any supernatural, extranatural powers. They do have technique that is smooth, fast and clean and a desire to teach, a desire to familiarize Americans with this half-exotic, half-familiar tropical karate. 



Rudy, in black, decks Paul with a *bukulan* combination reminiscent of the Chinese kung-fu and *kuoshu* fighting systems. Paul leads with a straight left punch (1)— Rudy does not block but pulls out of range, swings Paul's arm downward (2), and uses the same hand for a riposte to the face (3 and 4) which knocks Paul backward. Rudy then steps in for a leg entanglement (5 to 8). Paul heads for the ground and Rudy follows with a kick and an open-hand blow (9 and 10).

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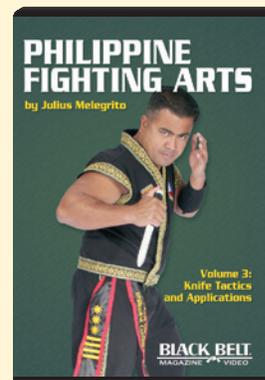
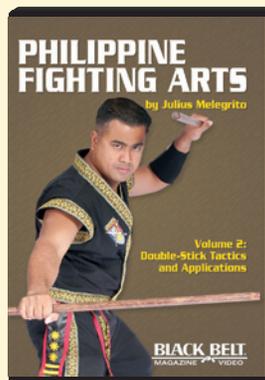
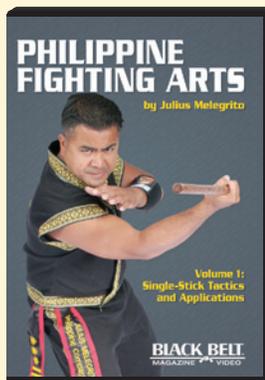
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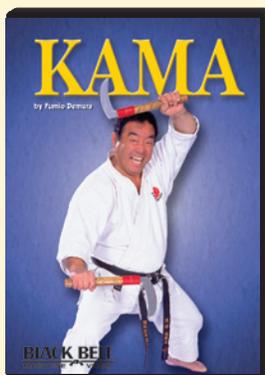
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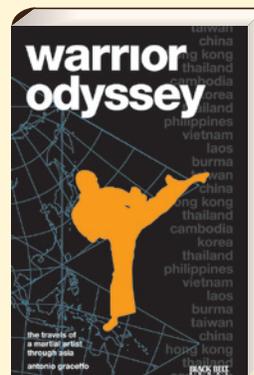


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