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TRADITIONAL FILIPINO

Edged Weapons

The Karambit has been carried by Indonesians since the 11th century. It was not originally designed as a weapon, but a tool that evolved into a fighting knife because people needed to protect themselves from foreign invaders.

BY PAT CASCIO

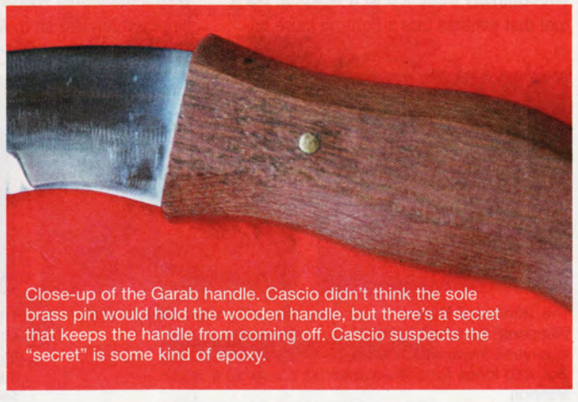
Over the years I've had the great fortune of working with a number of true professionals in the martial-arts field. The late Col. Rex Applegate was, without a doubt, a true master when it came to gun and knife fighting, even though he didn't hold any ranking in the martial arts. Applegate taught me a lot about knife- and gun-fighting skills when I worked for him. The late Master John McSweeney also taught me his style of point shooting and knife fighting. Master Tom Saviano, who heads up the American Kenpo Karate Association, has taught me a lot about what it means to be a serious street fighter. He doesn't teach competition-style fighting, he teaches serious techniques for the mean streets. I was active in martial arts, both as a student and as an instructor for over 35 years. I hold black-belt ranks in several different

The Garab knife and Karambit both came with traditional wooden sheaths. The author would like to see Kydex sheaths as an option as well.

(Top): Garab Knife
(Bottom): Karambit. Both are traditional Filipino weapons in the strictest sense—very well made and will last a lifetime.

Slightly different view of two Filipino weapons

Close-up on the hardwood handle on the Traditional Filipino Weapons' Karambit. Note the ribs in the wood for a sure grip under all weapons conditions. The author likes it!



Close-up of the Garab handle. Cascio didn't think the sole brass pin would hold the wooden handle, but there's a secret that keeps the handle from coming off. Cascio suspects the "secret" is some kind of epoxy.

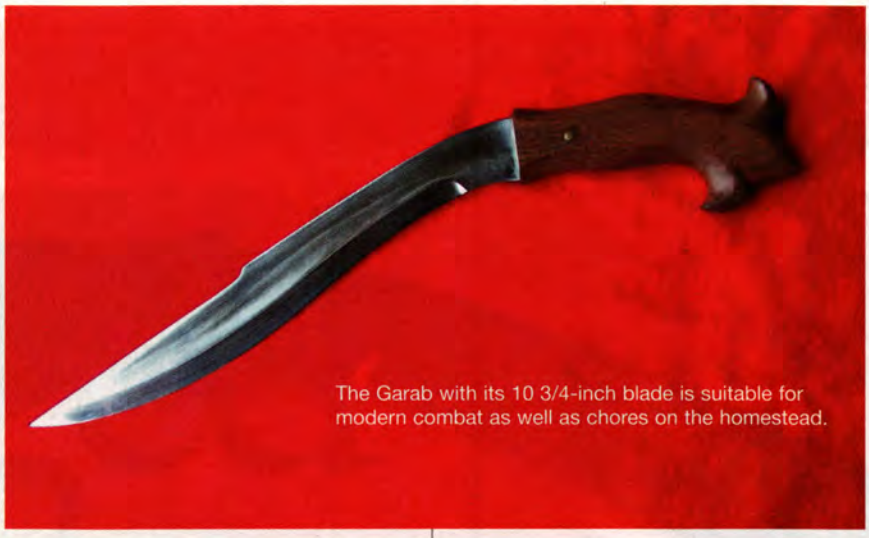
styles of martial arts.

There is one thing in common with all of the above people mentioned: They liked serious, edged weapons that could be used to one day save your butt. That's why Applegate and W.E. Fairbairn came up with the Applegate/Fairbairn double-edged fighting knife. They saw a need and filled it with their own design.

During the summer of 2008, I was contacted by a martial artist by the name of Ron Kosakowski, who runs Traditional Filipino Weapons, a company that designs and sells serious, edged weapons based on Filipino-style cutlery. Kosakowski's martial arts background started back in 1967. Kosakowski's bio is too lengthy to go into here, so I suggest you check out his Web site at www.traditionalfilipinoweapons.com for a complete and very impressive rundown on his training and background, and what led up to the traditional Filipino weapons he now sells.

The point to all of this is that you understand that the edged weapons I reviewed for this article are not toys, nor are they cheaply made. These are some of the finest Filipino edged weapons that I've seen, bar none! I had a difficult time selecting just a few of his edged weapons for this article, but many really caught my attention. I was impressed with both the Garab knife and the Karambit. I'll start out with the Karambit (properly pronounced "kah-RAHM-bit"). This design is not new, although, some believe it's a recent design.

The Karambit has been carried by Indonesians since the 11th century. It was not originally designed as a weapon, but a tool that evolved into a fighting knife because people needed to protect themselves from foreign invaders.



The Garab with its 10 3/4-inch blade is suitable for modern combat as well as chores on the homestead.

The Karambit I review here is hand-forged from high-carbon 5160 steel. It will rust and stain if not properly taken care of; keep a light coat of oil on the blade. The blade is slightly over 3 1/2 inches in length and is curved. Each knife is heat-treated to a 59-61.

Several years ago, the Karambit design was popular in the U.S., but for some reason, it seems to have fallen out of favor with many knife companies. I don't understand this. It is a fine fighting-knife design. Additionally, the blade is double-edge, which means it can be used for slashing as well as ripping defense. The wood handle has ribs milled into it for a sure grip. The butt has an O-ring as part of the one-piece blade. The handle also has grooves for proper finger placement in the fencing or reverse grip.

My Karambit came razor-sharp. A dull knife is a dangerous knife! It also came with a traditional wooden sheath with a belt/clothing clip on it. And, it's the sheath that is my only minor complaint. I'd like to see a Kydex sheath offered as an option with this knife, along with a better belt/clothing clip.

The knife is designed as an outstanding self-defense weapon. I found the blade fast in the hand with slashing and ripping moves, and it can also be used to trap an attacker's hand or arm to force him into submission.

The Garab is something to behold. We're not talking about a knife that you can conceal and carry on a regular basis. This knife was designed for combat use. With its 10 3/4-inch high-carbon 5160 blade, it's impressive. The Garab's blade has a curve to it—something akin to a pirate's sword.

I was concerned with the wooden handle on this knife; it only has one brass pin in it. I thought for sure that the handle would separate from the full-tang blade if used heavily, as in brush clearing. Kosakowski isn't about to reveal the secret used to secure the handle to the blade, but I'm sure it's some kind of epoxy. The sole brass pin wouldn't keep the wooden

The Traditional Filipino Weapons' Karambit is befitting to anyone involved in martial arts who longs for a real-world weapon.

A quality alternative to wall hangers

The Garab. It's sure to be popular with martial artists and military Spec-Ops warrior who want a serious long-bladed knife for self-defense.

The Garab and Karambit—a winning combination

The Karambit can be used in a ripping move...

...as well as a slashing move.

Again, in a slashing move with a slightly different grip

The Hagibis. This baby is very popular at Traditional Filipino Weapons. It "sings" when you swing it through the air. Photo by Dave Everett.

handle on the butt of the knife. I did some serious chopping while removing blackberry vines around my homestead, and the handle didn't come loose. It surprised me!

The Garab knife is the little brother to the Garab sword. What the big sword can't do, the "little" Garab can. It was designed as an everyday tool for farmers, but like the Karambit, it evolved into a formidable self-defense blade. The sheath—which is once again my sole complaint—is made out of wood, with no way of securely carrying the knife on a belt like on a pistol belt or tactical assault vest. I can visualize someone just sliding the knife between his or her belt and pant, but that's not very secure. Once again, I'd like to see a Kydex or even a leather sheath option with this knife. It would make one helluva combat blade for a soldier in the field.

Several other edged weapons caught my attention while perusing Kosakowski's Web site. I've included photos of the Hagibis, Barong, and Balisong #1 in this article. Ron tells me that the most popular knife—and most unusual—he sells is the Hagibis, which "sings" when you slash it through the air.

As many *KI* readers know, most of my articles are about modern tactical knives with a few hunting knives thrown in for good measure. It was refreshing to write about some traditional Filipino weapons. No one will be disappointed with the products Kosakowski is selling. And remember, these are all custom made, so no two are alike.

These are edged weapons meant to be used and admired. If you want a wall hanger that you can brag about, then be sure to check out Kosakowski's Traditional Filipino Weapons. Retail price on the Karambit is $145 and the Garab is $155. KI

This is the popular Balisong folder. It's as popular as ever. Photo by Dave Everett.

The easily recognized Barong. It's a tool, as well as a weapon. Photo by Dave Everett.