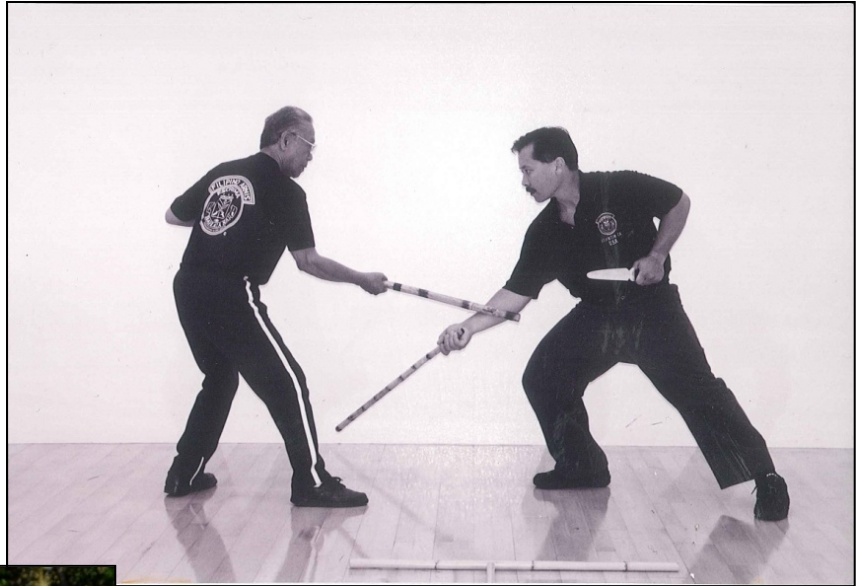


## Bahala Na Bows Its Head

I would like to start this article by saying the martial arts world has lost a valuable member of its community, but when talking of Grand Master Antonio Somera that simply is not enough. The truth of the matter is that the world was a better place for having him. He was more than just a world class martial artist. He was a visionary, a community leader, and perhaps one the best human beings on the planet. So with his passing on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013, not only should we as martial artists mourn this loss, but we as human beings should stop and reflect on the man he strove to be and goals he worked so hard to achieve with his Bahala Na brothers.

GM Tony Somera was heir to the Giron Arnis Escrima system under GME Leo Giron, where he had carried the torch of Bahala Na Martial Arts after Manong Leo's passing. GM Tony was a student of GME Giron's for many many years and was the only person appointed to carry on the system by Manong Leo personally. Aside from that, GM Tony was Giron's friend. He visited him every day, took him to doctors appointments, went out to lunch and helped him conduct his daily business. As a loyal friend, you could not ask for better.



As a student, GM Tony literally cataloged every technique in the Giron Arnis Escrima system. He diligently took pictures of GME Giron and himself performing each technique, carefully capturing footwork, body postures, hand positions, etc. Along with this he filmed the two of them performing each technique in order to preserve the Giron system for



future generations. GM Tony also felt it important to learn and record GME Giron's history. He conducted and recorded numerous interviews with GME Giron about his time during WWII, philosophy of life, and of course, training. Eventually GM Tony helped Manong Giron write his biography about his life, *Memories Ride the Ebb of Tide*.



Over the years GM Tony himself authored several books on the Giron Arnis Escrima system. He also released several DVDs on the system, thus helping to educate the public and create a database that would help Bahala Na students all over the world. His discipline in the art, forward thinking, and dedication to GM Giron and his system made him a student second to none.

Part of Manong Giron's philosophy was that the Bahala Na Martial Arts organization should give back to the community. He believed his purpose

was to help teach people to be aware of a larger purpose, a purpose not self glorifying but of sacrifice to their community. With this philosophy, GM Tony went forward armed with his students in Bahala Na and became a driving force in Stockton, CA. He was a leading member of FAHNS, the Filipino American National Historic Society and a board member of the Little Manila Foundation. GM Tony played an integral role in the saving of the "Little Manila District" in Stockton. This effort had GM Tony and the members of Bahala Na helping to preserve and renovate the older buildings that had historic meaning to the local Filipino community. He lead

the group to clean areas of town, paint buildings, organize drives to raise money, and in general support the effort to change the "Little Manila District" into a shining part of downtown Stockton. As a community leader, GM Tony was beyond compare.

Perhaps one of the most impactful projects GM Tony was responsible for was educating martial artists from around the world about the significance of Stockton and the Filipino history associated with it. This started when he began



hosting Affiliate Training Camps for Bahala Na members. During these Affiliate Camps students were given the opportunity to tour Stockton and were allowed the privilege of visiting people and places they would not normally have access to. These tours became famous and students from other systems sought out GM Tony because they wanted the chance to spend time with him and learn about the history of Filipino martial arts. The tours included visiting the oldest asparagus packing house in the







U.S. and seeing firsthand how the immigrant Filipinos worked and earned their way into the American culture. GM Tony was also a huge supporter of his Bahala Na brother, the world famous, Dan Inosanto. Inosanto was the first graduate under Grand Master Giron and a local boy raised just a couple of blocks from Giron's house. Some of the high points of the tours included stopping by the house Dan Inosanto grew up in, visiting the park where Inosanto did his interviews for his book *The Filipino Martial Arts*, and visiting the Dagohoy Lodge, a Filipino Masonic Lodge, where one of Inosanto's most famous teachers, Juan LaCoste, was shot and killed.

A focal point of each tour was a visit to the Park View Cemetery. With this stop students were given the chance to pay respects at the grave of GME Giron and

share fond memories with GM Tony. These somber stops lead to paying respects at the final resting place of many Filipino Masters including Juan LaCoste, Angel Caballes, Manong Ton and others. On many of these visits students were also given the chance to pay homage to Dan Inosanto's family by stopping at the Inosanto and Arca family graves as well.



One of the most momentous experiences of the tour was having the honor of visiting many of the last surviving Escrimadors of WWII. These were men who earned their livings in the fields but who were men of Escrima with reputations of their own. Manong Victorio Ton, Manong Jesus Corales, and Manong Joe Pacpaco became regular stops where visitors learned of traditional customs. While visiting elders they would hear the great, colorful and rich stories told by these now bent and soft spoken old men. These



visits enriched the lives of both the young and the old and it is hard to say who appreciated the visits more. Without GM Tony Somera, these tales would have gone untold and unknown and our generation would simply be less without them. So it seems that as a historian he certainly did his part to carry the torch to the next generation, no matter what your style.





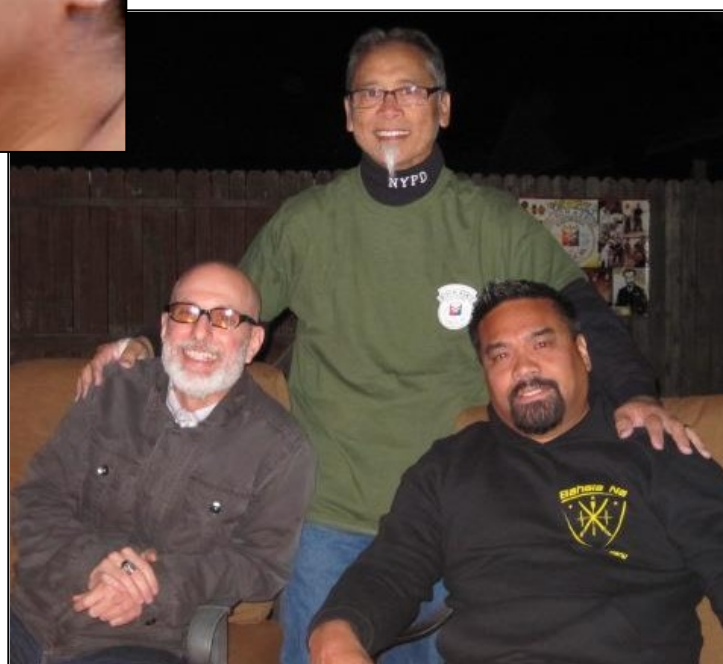
The last act of GM Tony Somera's work came to fruition the day before he passed away. The city of Stockton commemorated the legacy of Leo Giron as a decorated WWII hero, Founder of Bahala Na and leading member of the community with the official naming of the Leo Giron Drive. GM Tony worked ceaselessly on this project for years. He coordinated efforts between the Little Manila Foundation, the FANHS, the Inosanto Academy and Bahala Na Martial Arts to make this dream come true. This dedication happened because he inspired so many people to write letters, make phone calls or send in faxes of support to county planners. GM Tony's pride in Giron never diminished over the years and to see his teacher being honored in such a way was a high point of his life.



Lastly, this article would not be complete if I did not take a moment to talk about what a great husband and friend GM Tony was. Just as in every other aspect of his life he was one of the best. You could see and feel the love between him and his wife Sally. He was an inspiration to all men on how a husband should act and treat his wife. He treated his friends just as well. You could always count on him to listen and give his unbiased opinion or advice. I personally am going to miss our long

conversations on the phone most. He was one of the most insightful people I have ever met. There is no doubt in my mind I am a better man for knowing him.

GM Antonio Somera's legacy will carry on. Just as he did for Grand Master Giron, so too will Master Kirk McCune and Master Joel Juanitas for him. Aided by the Guros and graduates of Bahala Na, the Giron Arnis Escrima system will continue as strong as ever. Following in their mentor's footsteps, they continue to push to be a positive influence in their communities.





We are deeply saddened by the loss of such a great friend and one of the few examples of selfless sacrifice towards a greater cause. GM Tony was one of the good guys. One of his last wishes was that we remember the good times with him and share stories of his life. This is one wish we are definitely happy to fulfill.

Bahala Na!!!  
Guro Harley Elmore