

by Guru Scott McQuaid

Foreword:

I immigrated to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to study blade fighting with world-renowned blade master Maha Guru Jak Othman. My preferred pencak silat style is Minangkabau Silek Harimau and I wanted to evolve the blade work within the style. Guru Jak accepted me as his student and I began my training in this Javanese system, Harimau Berantai Silat. Over the years I did manage to evolve the Minangkabau Harimau art while still maintaing the styles structure and mindset towards combat. But I also became efficient as a student in Harimau Berantai. This Indonesian art is both old and rare and the knife techniques are very real and extremely deadly. With the blessing of my blade teacher Maha Guru Jak Othman I am opening the doors of this silat style, giving an insight into this closely guarded secret art. Life's tragedy is that we get old to soon and wise too late.

The style known as Harimau Berantai Silat comes from central Java in Indonesia; its exact whereabouts is unknown. Like many styles of silat this name was not the art's first - in bygone years silat styles were named after the village where the teacher lived or their family name and others were named after an animal that had some influence over the art.

Silat roots date back to the Srivijaya warriors around the 7th century, during which time silat expanded with the Srivijaya kingdom across South East Asia and continued to spread with immigrants of the Majapahit empire. This was the first empire to unite all of Indonesia's major islands and Javanese silat reached its peak under Majapahit.

Most silat was referred to as Bersilat which is a very basic style that exists in two forms. The first is *silat pulot*. This is the artistic movement applied that was exhibited for state visits and

today it is performed for weddings. The other element is known as *silat buah* (fruit) which comprises of the actual combative techniques in forms.



Silat was predominately a weapon based fighting system as the battlefields from the 13th to the 16th century were places of blades and blood. The Harimau Berantai style focuses on the blade, to fight with it and against it. The role of the Srikandi or woman warrior has played a big part in the development of Harimau Berantai silat. In the olden days, the women went to war standing side by side with their male counterparts. The main weapons used by the these women warriors were the *belati* or dagger, the *kerambit* which is the popular curved claw shaped knife and the *ekor pari* which is a stingray tail used as a whip. The women would conceal these weapons with the stingray tail wrapped around their waist beneath their sarong and often hide the small three inch curved kermabit blade in the bun tie in their hair.

There is an old folktale about the ekor pari or stingray tail. The story tells of a woman in Java

cooking the stingray fish in her kampung or village. Suddenly a man entered her house and started to attack her. During the struggle the woman grabbed the discarded tail of the stingray and whipped the man to defeat. She shared her discovery of this whipping device with her village and it is then said that the stingray tail was included into the fighting style of silat. The Srikandi (women warriors) were exceptional Harimau Beranati pesilats (silat players) and it is because of this why the system today does not rely on strength, but calculated speed, skill and precession.

The style got its name during the 18th century. Before this time the style was suspected to be under a guru or teacher's family name. The warrior Pendekar Haji Asraf is said to have been a master of this style and he lead a band of rebels against the Dutch in Indonesia during the 18th century. Pendekar Asraf's ferocity and expertise in battle earned him a title from his adversaries. The Dutch called him '*macan*' meaning tiger, however due to his status as a pious man being the head of the Islamic religion for his clan, his people changed the title to Harimau Berantai which means 'chained tiger'. This meant a warrior chained down to earth by his virtue and iman or faith in Islam. The chain signified the degree of self control and religious faith. It has been noted that until today a high degree of self-control is still the main prerequisite for those wishing to study this system of pencak silat. Pendekar Kiyai Haji Asraf later furthered the Harimau Berantai name when he led a rebel group of pesilats to carry out covert operations on Dutch military camps. In time his entire clan would become known as Harimau Berantai and subsequently the silat they practiced.



Harimau Berantai silat uses all the core traditional Indonesian weapons such as the *keris* (wavy

