

Whip It Good!

The Filipino whip is among the few weapons that is equally dangerous in all ranges of combat



Tom Meadows (kneeling) and Anthony De Longis have spent decades perfecting the Filipino fighting whip. The two still train together regularly at De Longis' California ranch.

PHOTO BY JASON WILLIAM MCNEIL

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The whip is one of mankind's oldest tools, with origins pre-dating recorded history. Deceptively simple in design, the flexible whip was also the first of man's creations to break the sound barrier. Relatively easy to construct, popping and cracking faster than the speed of sound and able to mark the hide of even the sturdiest livestock, it certainly didn't take much of a leap in logic for our forefathers to turn their whip skills to self-defense.

Most cultures around the world developed some version of the whip, as well as the specialized skills that go along with its use. Many of those skill sets have been

lost to history, and even among martial artists, who are known to revel in training with anachronistic weapons, the whip is rarely practiced. For Tom Meadows and Anthony De Longis, however, an encounter at Dan Inosanto's school led to both decades-long devotion to mastering the Filipino fighting whip and a life-long friendship that continues—amid the cracks of super-sonic flying leather—to this day.

"I had found guro Dan's collection of whips," recalls Meadows. "The whip is a fundamentally anti-social weapon, which meant that I had to practice out in the parking lot. While I was out there, another student, Anthony De Longis,

came out to watch and coach me. In the space of a half-hour, he showed me a level of technical excellence that started me on an 18-year path of study. I still train with Anthony to this day, and consider him one of the finest whip practitioners in the world."

Diverging Roads

Since that day outside the Inosanto Academy, Meadows and De Longis have continued their studies of the Filipino fighting whip, each according to his specialized needs. After nearly two decades of practice and training with numerous

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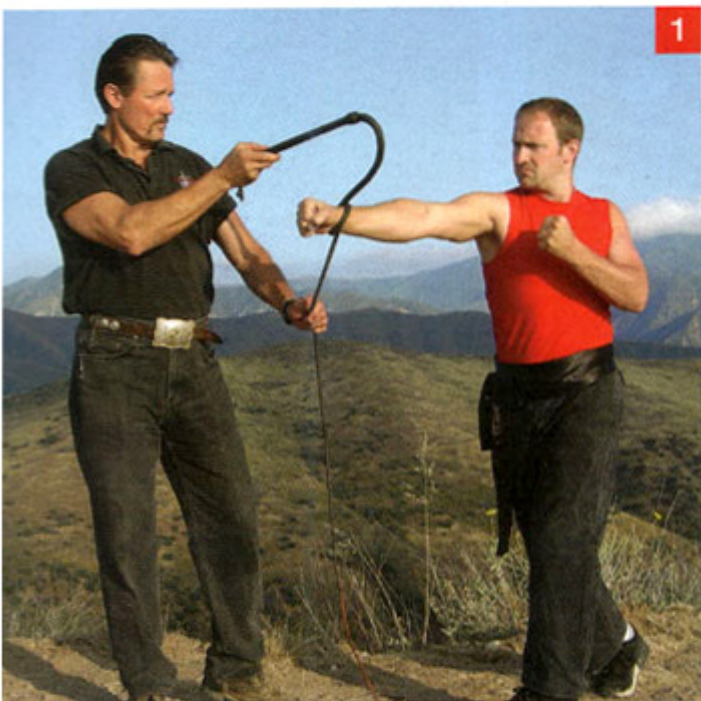
Using a whip and knife in tandem, Meadows (left) wraps an attacker's neck at distance (1), then pulls him into range for a cut to the throat (2).



At medium range, Meadows (left) checks his attacker's knifehand while striking with the whip's heavy wood and leather handle (1), then loops over the head for a finishing choke (2).

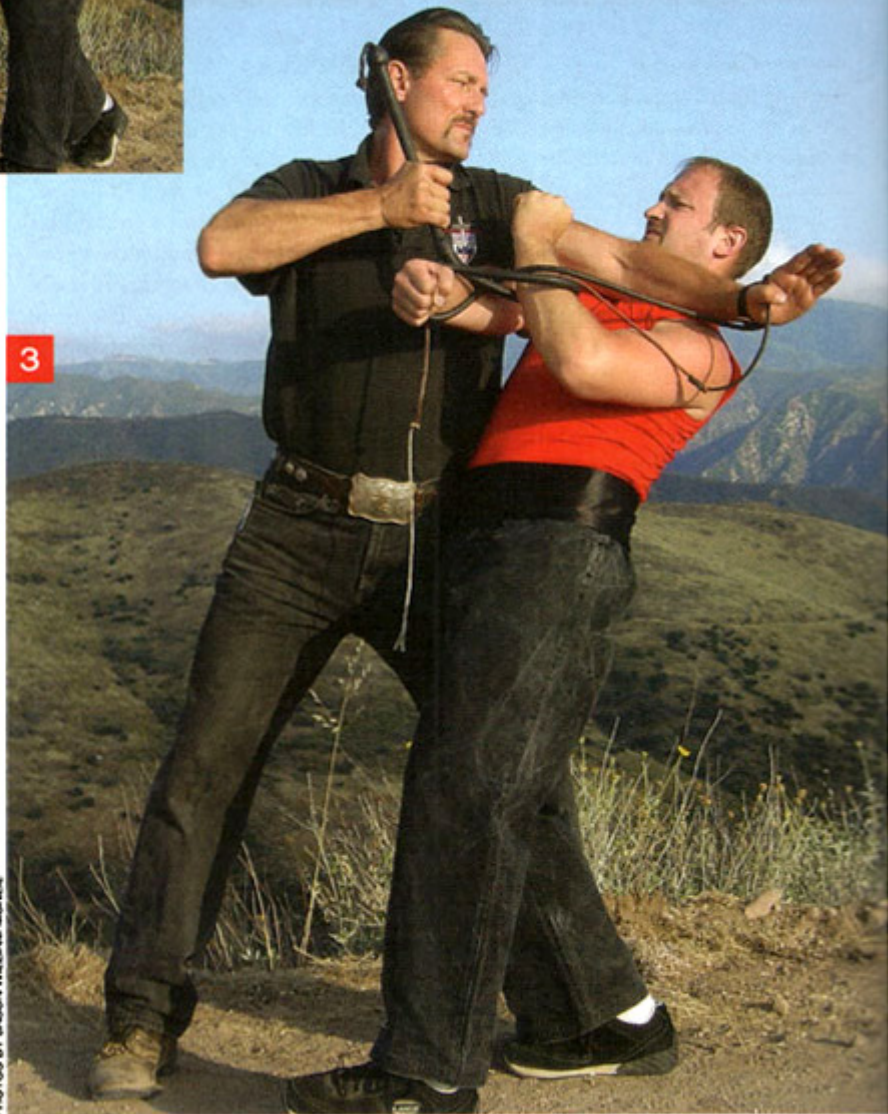
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Anthony De Longis (left) demonstrates how the whip can be used to trap (1), entangle (2) and even bludgeon (3) at medium and grappling ranges.

masters of *escrima*, *arnis* and *kali*, Meadows has developed a method of combat whip training he calls *latigo y daga* (Spanish for *sword and knife*.) De Longis, a professional actor and fight choreographer, has developed an exacting, efficient and safety-oriented method of whip manipulation for use in film and television, featured in "Batman Returns" (for which he trained and choreographed Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman), "Bad Girls," "Into the West" and in the trailers for the newest "Zorro" film. Although Meadows trains primarily for combat and De Longis always practices with performance in mind ("Anthony wants you to see everything as it happens; Tom wants you to feel it before you see it," says Steve Kohn, a student of the De Longis method and instructor of *latigo y daga*), both methods proceed from combative truths and are rooted firmly in the basic principles, vocabularies and even numbering systems of the Filipino fighting arts. Especially at advanced levels of



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If an opponent closes in to medium range, one can use the handle like a nunchaku or baton, while enveloping and entangling an attack (1-4).

training, technical crossover is common between the styles.

According to Meadows (whose book, "The Filipino Fighting Whip," was recently published by Paladin Press), the whip is an ideal tool for the martial artist schooled in Filipino fighting arts, because the skilled *latigo y daga* practitioner can use it to execute stick and knifefighting skills, as well as those techniques unique to the weapon. When developing *latigo y daga*, Meadows' "primary assumption was that its effective combative range needed to cover everything from grappling range to 10 feet away from the body. The whip is one of the few weapons that can...do this effectively."

"The whip is the ultimate flexible weapon," explains De Longis. "Most people think of the whip as only a long-range weapon—and it is one of the best at that distance. However, if an opponent manages to close in to medium range,

one can use the handle like a nunchaku or baton, while enveloping and entangling an attack." Even at grappling range, the sturdy yet flexible length of braided leather allows for binding, wrapping, choking and even throwing an opponent.

To the Mountaintop

Decades since their initial parking-lot encounter, the crack of the whip still brings Meadows and De Longis together. Regularly meeting at De Longis' mountaintop ranch in Southern California, the two old friends trade techniques, try out new patterns and generally revel in practicing the arcane art that brought them together. As their individual training progresses, each has only kind things to say about the other's method and, in truth, is finding that what once seemed disparate training methods contain more common ground than separate.

"Guro Dan refers to the learning

process as one of 'uncovery,'" says Meadows. "No one invents or discovers new technique... rather, through training, practitioners find movements or techniques that are new to them. More than likely, some past martial artist found the same technique, which became lost through time."

There's no way to tell how many skills and techniques have been developed and subsequently lost in the untold centuries since the whip's invention. For martial artists, historians and lovers of leather and loud noises everywhere, it's heartening to know that, somewhere on a sun-baked mountaintop, there are at least two masters still seeking to "uncover" the secrets of one of mankind's oldest weapons. For more information, visit www.delongis.com. ☼

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