

Floro Fighting Systems: A Professional Perspective

Written by C. LeBlanc

C. LeBlanc FFS Instructor and SWAT Team member explores how FFS applies to the armed professional.



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(Suspect Armed with a Homemade Shank Attacks an Officer)

Knives and other objects capable of being used as edged and impact weapons are ubiquitous in daily life. All manner of such weapons are frequently found on the persons of those run afoul of the law. Indeed within certain subsets of the criminal world their presence is a given, not a probability. Therefore an express need to be aware of and comfortable with the use of knives and impact weapons exists, particularly for those police officers tasked with contacting the people that carry such weapons on a routine basis. Sad to say, these weapons will also be used against officers, and officers will have occasion to use them in the performance of their work. In terms of edged and impact weapons training this continues to be my primary focus both personally and professionally as both a trainer and an “end user” in the field.

Law enforcement officers require a system of weapons awareness, defense, and deployment that is straightforward, quickly learned, and easily retained. Skills must be effective before they become sophisticated, but sophistication should develop as skill is honed. The basic framework of the system should transfer to a wide variety of circumstances, and officers need to be able to use them under any conditions – environmental as well as physical. Finally, skills need to be effective under pressure, when fighting against someone actively fighting back and attempting to thwart their use.

All of which are hallmarks of the Floro Fighting Systems (FFS).

I first became aware of the FFS the same way many other people did. I saw clips of Raymond Floro sparring on the Internet.

What he did was compact, direct, and simple. Judging from the reactions he was getting from his sparring partners, deceptively so. He was effortlessly hitting his opponents, hard, while they tried to hit back but usually fell short. While at first glance it looked like the knife and stick sparring that one might see in a number of martial arts schools, I saw no flourishes, very little wasted movement, no slick and showy twirling or tap-tapping of sticks or hands

often found in other edged weapons training. When I read the forums in which Ray began expounding on the method to his madness, I grew even more interested.

The previous Filipino martial arts (FMA) practice I had been exposed to was through law enforcement training. Edged weapons familiarization and survival, baton training of various types, and even empty hand applications from trainers with strong backgrounds in FMA. By and large even the pared down stuff taught in law enforcement retained a lot of superfluous movement and “martial artsy” flourishes that had little relation to the applications for which police officers might need such training. FFS looked like it might be different.

I attended a seminar and was treated to a display of Ray Floro’s skill. I was more impressed with what he was doing than with how well he did it, however. Many people are effective due to personal attributes, not the training or fighting system. As a former champion fencer, and direct student of the late grandmaster Antonio Ilustrisimo of the Kalis Ilustrisimo system of Filipino weapons craft, Ray certainly has both the attributes and the pedigree to impress.

But there was something more. Everyone at the seminar was very quickly able to use the same things Ray did. Certainly not with the same level of skill, but it was clear to me that with practice we would be capable of the same things. He did not demonstrate drills and tactics that looked nothing like what he did under pressure, but taught exactly what he was using against people fighting back using whatever style they wanted. And instead of hinting at advanced techniques or secret training for those initiated into his “lineage,” the advanced concepts were simply more sophisticated ways of using the same simple methods.

When he finished a mere few hours of teaching and said that he had taught his entire knife system, I was shocked. Was that it?

Not quite. In and of itself, knife sparring represents an unlikely combination of factors in terms of real world violence. It does however develop an open skill set based in the crucial elements of timing, position, explosive speed and power, and technical efficiency and adaptability against an adversary free to counter attack as he sees fit – in other words, the most critical elements of a real fight.

It also provides an excellent means of patterning an awareness of weapons handling cues, an instinctive understanding of combative distance, and instantaneous recognition and response to all permutations of angles of attack. All things that apply equally when fighting unarmed against a knife as when fighting while armed with one. Situational variables certainly won’t be the same, but the skills adapt very well when trained with proper mindset.

If FFS were only about knife sparring, it would be a useful training method, if not a particularly special one. But I have found that it is outside its immediate use as a bladed weapons combat system that is most applicable for law enforcement purposes.

FFS use for police baton training goes without saying; The machete/stick method, like the knife system, is simple and learned very quickly. Testing it in force-on-force training with fellow officers, I found them to be immediately functional against armed and unarmed attackers after only brief instruction in the fundamentals. There is the added advantage of an emphasis on close in weapons handling – allowing it to function in tight quarters like doorways or narrow hallways (such as in a trailer home), or with a fellow officer standing nearby – a common pitfall of wider, twirling based methods being the accidental striking of nearby officers during baton deployment.

Due to the FFS emphasis on common principles and tactics across diverse weapon types, the knife method readily transfers to non-knife tools, most notably in terms of law

enforcement to shorter “fist load” implements such as tactical flashlights. FFS knife tactics can be used without modification when striking with these lights, and would be very useful in a building search or similar circumstance in which the tactical light was deployed along with a firearm and a need for an immediate non-lethal alternative, or a weapon retention situation emerged. Indeed almost any short object can be used in the same manner, as was ably demonstrated by an FFS practitioner who had occasion to use a cell phone against multiple assailants in an unfortunate (for them!) real world confrontation.

The knife method also relates directly to empty hand boxing skills. The very same movements used in fighting with the knife, or with short implements, can be used empty handed. But unlike traditional boxing methods, FFS does not make use of “knuckle punching” techniques. Instead it utilizes striking with the bottom fist, edge of hand, forearms, and elbows at very close quarters. “Knuckle punching” can lead to broken hands in actual fights, and I know officers who have done so. A police officer can ill afford to damage the functioning of his hands in a fight with a combative suspect. Having a broken hand or fingers could seriously compromise the ability to restrain and handcuff a suspect, or to draw and use a sidearm or other weapon in a physical encounter that “goes south” after already coming to blows.

Additionally, empty hand striking of this type applies well with weapons in hand. The police tactical environment is an extremely complicated one. It involves the handling of weapons at very close quarters in and amongst persons who may offer anything along a wide spectrum of resistance. Tactical operators will be engaged in physical altercations with “no-shoot” subjects far more often than they will engage in shooting confrontations, and must be able to protect themselves and their weapons in both types of engagements. Operators must have a means of dominating resistance with stunning and/or controlling measures that can be applied with weapons in hand, and FFS striking skills have shown promise under exactly these conditions.

What is particularly noteworthy with the FFS method is that all of these skills can be practiced under pressure, through sparring and force-on-force drilling exercises. Moreover, due to its common principles and transfer across various weapons and empty hand usage, skills in each area are developed concomitantly i.e. knife training directly develops empty hand, which in turn develops fist load weapons, and so on. This is a boon when considering that most departments have a limited amount of time per year in which to train officers in disparate edged, impact and empty hand defensive tactics. With FFS, training in one is training in all of them.

In my ongoing experience with FFS since that original seminar, I have come find a great deal of practicality for this system in a variety of use-of-force applications.

Yet what is most refreshing is that Ray Floro does not pretend to be something he is not, which is rare in combative arts circles these days. He knows that what he has to teach has value for law enforcement and military professionals, but he does not pretend to be a “tactical guru.” He offers what he has and asks the experts to see it through their eyes, changing and adapting it to the specific needs and recommendations of the professional.

Which is a nice change from the wannabes and commercial commandos seeking validation of their modern day man-at-arms image in the post 9/11 world.

The author is a police officer and use-of-force instructor serving in patrol and SWAT assignments. He has experience with a variety of defensive tactics and tactical weapons disciplines, and background in fighting arts that includes the Floro Fighting Systems, judo, jujutsu, and traditional Japanese and Chinese arts.