

Sore Zore Iaido

People in Iaido

Osaka's Yagyu Hideo

8 Dan Hanshi in both Iaido and Kendo

Note:

The following is an informal translation of an article which appeared in the August 1997 edition of the Japanese magazine *Kendo Nippon Monthly*. It gives a number of insights into the background of iaido in Osaka. At the time of posting in 2012, Yagyu Sensei remains in good health at 84 years of age and active in iaido.

Profile

Born April 1928 in Nakamura Village in Kumamoto Prefecture.

1942 Entered Kumamoto Middle School

1943 Enlisted with Kumamoto Naval Air Division to become a pilot trainee. At the end of the war he was waiting for a mission as a kamikaze pilot. When Nagasaki was bombed he was ordered there on the following day to join the rescue operation.

1951 Joined Osaka Prefectural Police and started serious training in kendo. He became a member of the kidotai (riot squad) and in 1964 became a police kendo and taiho jutsu (arrest technique) instructor.

1967 Joined the Osaka Police Iaido Club and was introduced to Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu by Ikeda Teruo Hanshi although he had previously studied some seiza no bu iai techniques.

1989 Received 8 dan in both kendo and iaido.

1996 Awarded Hanshi in iaido at the Kyoto Taikai.

This year (1997) he was awarded Hanshi in kendo.

Currently lives in Osaka with his wife Emiko and is 69 years of age.

There aren't too many people with the rank of 8 Dan Hanshi in both iaido and kendo. Mr Yagyu was graded to both iaido and kendo 8 dan in 1989 whilst he was working for the Osaka Police. Last year he became iaido Hanshi and this year became kendo Hanshi as well. He is the 9th person still living to have both kendo and iaido 8 dan Hanshi ranks. He worked as a kendo instructor for the Osaka Police and remained in that capacity as a non regular employee after his official retirement.

In the year before last he had fully retired and applied for the title of Hanshi in both iaido and kendo. He was enjoying a variety of activities as a kendo/iaido instructor in Osaka and elsewhere and also had plenty of time to enjoy his hobby of azalea bonsai growing.

Actually last year I had to be hospitalised unexpectedly and had an operation. During the year before last I was diagnosed as having a prostate tumour but I asked my doctor to delay hospital treatment until after the Kyoto Taikai in May. So I continued hormone treatment and at that Taikai became iaido Hanshi. In the kendo 8

dan Kyoshi division I also did tachi ai with Kame Kazuo of Kanagawa Prefecture and was quite satisfied with my performance. Soon after the Taikai I went into hospital.

His wife Emiko was worried about him because the operation took some 11 hours and as a result required a number of blood transfusions. She was also concerned over the possible effects of his exposure to radiation in Nagasaki.

During the summer he started to train again. Although he initially lacked stomach strength, his stamina eventually overcame the illness and by the end of Autumn he could attend all regular iai practice including morning sessions.

At the Kyoto Taikai in May this year he did embu (demonstration) in the iaido 8 dan Hanshi division and also tachi ai in kendo and was awarded the title of Hanshi in kendo. Thereafter he always had a smile on his face but not many people knew of his battle with illness.

Looking back now I was able to battle the illness as a result of the long process of training until I became kendo 8 dan and also through severe training in the Police Force. Some people say that you can't learn anything except through harsh training in kendo and iaido and in my case I think such things gave me power directly and indirectly and thus I was in a position to overcome my illness.

Mr Yagyu originally received his shodan in kendo in 1943 when he was in second grade at Kumamoto Middle School. Later in the same year (autumn) he enlisted in the navy at Kagoshima as a trainee pilot.

On 9 August 1945 the day of the A Bomb attack on Nagasaki he was waiting to be given a mission as a kamikaze pilot and was stationed at a navy base near the City. Right after the explosion he was ordered to go there to check the situation and take part in the rescue effort. He entered Nagasaki by truck and found a sight he could hardly bear to look at. Later amongst those that entered the City with him, there were several who became sick as a result of exposure to radiation. Many years later he was to receive certification as a person who survived exposure to radiation.

Fortunately in his case there have been no residual effects. Even so, his later hospitalisation was still a source of worry to his wife since she was aware that many A Bomb survivors suffer from cancer.

After the war was over, he returned to Kumamoto and completed his education.

In 1950, the Osaka Police recruited in Kumamoto and Mr Yagyu was one of only three who passed the recruiting test. In 1951, he entered the Police Force and at that time was 22 years old.

It was about the time that the Police Force in Osaka was being restructured. Keibo jutsu (police stick art) was active and they identified people who were good at keibo jutsu through competitions and nominated them as special trainees. In 1952, the first group of trainees was formed and I was part of the second group in 1953. That was the start of my serious budo training. Mori Gempei was a kendo instructor who also did iaido and I managed to learn some seiza no bu from him at that time.

In 1956, I was transferred to the kidotai (riot squad) and at that time had a 5 dan in kendo. The special training had been so severe that in my group only 3 people lasted until the end.

At that time he was trained by a number of people who later became kendo Hanshi. They included Yoshimura, Kaku and Okuzono. Another of the instructors, Mr Sakamoto trained Yagyu Sensei severely.

In those days, many kendo teachers said that iaido was a hindrance to the development of ability in kendo so the trainees couldn't practise iaido openly. However, Sakamoto Sensei as well as being a police kendo instructor, was also a prominent member of the Yae Gakki Kai. This group promoted the Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu style of iaido in the Osaka area and had been doing so since before the war. Even though Sakamoto Sensei was criticised in some quarters, he practised iaido at the Osaka Police Dojo.

I was always being scolded by Sakamoto Sensei although in his case this was sort of an expression of intimacy and he actually took really good care of me. When they had a taikai at the Yae Gakki Kai, Sakamoto Sensei invited me to take part in the yari or naginata competition. Through this association I came to know iaido better than many others in the Osaka Police.

Later on Yagyu Sensei himself became a police kendo instructor and started in that position at the Toyonaka Police Station at the rank of 7 dan Kyoshi in 1965. The following year he won the 7 dan division in the Police Kendo Competition.

Then Shigeoka Sensei said to me: Congratulations! Let's practise together. He was amazingly strong and I couldn't move. I was so impressed that such a person could exist in this world.

In 1967, he became familiar with Ikeda Sensei who was senior to him as a kendo instructor. He was good at iai, jodo, and kobudo and had started an iaido club within the Osaka Police. Yagyu Sensei joined the club. By that time the teachers who had told him not to practise iaido had retired and as a result more than ten other police kendo instructors also practised iai with Mr Ikeda.

Kendo had become so popular but there were many kendo students who didn't know basic katana or swords methods (toho). So at that time Otani Kazuo Sensei put forward a proposal to the ZNKR. As a result, Zen Ken Ren iai was presented in order to educate kendo students with basic toho. I was also thinking that kendo was drawn from kenpo and that kendo and iai are two sides of the one coin. Furthermore, kendo students needed to know toho from iai. This episode is quite recent but in 1994 when I was sent to Belgium by the ZNKR, the foreign kendo students believed that Japanese kendo people would naturally be able to do Japanese sword kenpo or iaido. It is natural to think this way and maybe kendo people who can't do iai may look strange. But then again people who teach kendo don't always have time to learn iaido. Many people who started to practise with Ikeda Sensei quit but for some reason I just couldn't.

Mr Yagyu bought a house near Nara Prefecture and from 1970 started to teach kendo to local children. That club was called Shijo Kita Kendo Club and is still active.

Yagyu Sensei came to teach iaido to the fathers of the children, this was because that area had an old history and many people owned swords.

I recommended that the fathers practise iai saying it was a waste if you had a sword and just kept it on the shelf. So I had a responsibility not to teach something wrong. I taught Jikiden as well as Zen Ken Ren. There were lots of opportunities to be taught by Sakamoto, Ikeda, and Fukuda Sensei because in Osaka combined training is commonplace. I also got good training as well. All my students trained hard and now three have gone on to become 7 dan.

Iaido grew in popularity and even in the Police Force people came to mention iaido more often.

If you are a policeman you should have knowledge of the sword. So I taught sword appreciation, I also told them that iaido could be a way to develop communication with the community so a few people got interested and started training.

From about 1976, he became really keen at iaido and also aimed towards his kendo 8 dan. In those days one couldn't just go straight to the shinsa instead you had to pass a pre shinsa or qualification test. Anyway after reaching the age of 48 (the minimum to apply for 8 dan) he sat pre shinsa qualification some 11 times.

It was an ordeal I could never pass pre shinsa. I really wondered why since I trained so hard but I never gave up. I also trained iai hard and in the process made many friends through my training. When I taught iaido I referred to kendo's riai and conversely I was also thinking in terms of katana no riai during kendo training. The te no uchi in cutting in iai is the same as in kendo for example. I often explained to my students that one shouldn't train thoughtlessly or in a reckless fashion. So while I was talking to my students I was training myself at the same time. During the time that I kept failing I had time to think deeply about kendo and now I think it was an important turning point in my training.

On his 12th attempt he finally passed pre shinsa and went to the 8 dan grading at the Kyoto Taikai. For two years he passed the first stage of the grading but not the second. In 1989 he passed iaido 8 dan.

So I felt light hearted and that it was alright to fail (kendo 8 dan) again that year. I was so relaxed and maybe that turned out to be a good thing. After the presentation Taniya Hanshi (now deceased) said 'It is only you that received both 8 dan at the one time.' He used to be a senior police instructor and was expert in both kendo and iaido so I was happy to hear his comments.

After I retired I was taking kendo classes at a high school twice a week but when I had to go into hospital I quit. I have completely recovered now and although I train less often at regular sessions I have more opportunities to go out.

Mr Yagyu now attends the special Zen Ken Ren training that is held every two months at the Kyoto Butokuden as well as Osaka Shudokan training twice a week. He also conducts training at a local children's kendo club. As well as his involvement in the Osaka Iaido Bu he now has more opportunity to accompany Ikeda and Fukuda Sensei when they travel to various parts of Japan to teach.