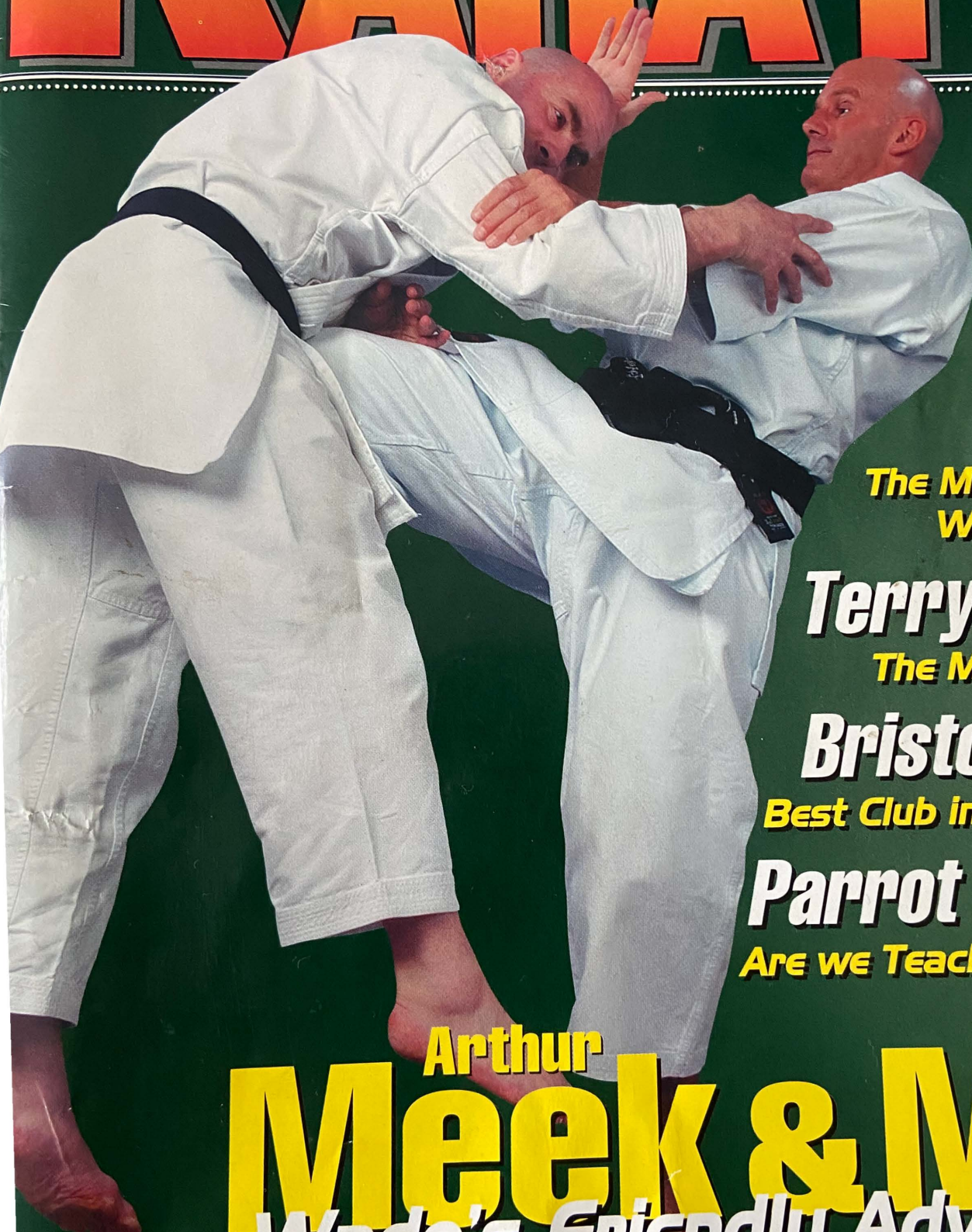


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Arthur Meek & Peter May

Common Denominators

Associations, politics, style, techniques, all add to the great divide that we talk about so much in the martial arts but what about the other side of the coin? Honesty, integrity, loyalty allied to open-mindedness and humanity, these were qualities I recognised in two men who have successfully trodden remarkably similar paths; both superb Wado practitioners, both keen on cross training, both avid fight fans, both loyal aides to a highly respected Japanese sensei, just not the same Japanese sensei. Arthur trains with Shiomitsu sensei, Peter with Sakagami sensei, but this hasn't stopped these two men, respected in their own right, from maintaining a lifelong friendship. When I interview them it becomes clear that they even share a similar moral and ethical code and teaching principles and were looking forward to this interview as a great way of catching up.

TRAD: you're with different associations now but yours is a long-standing relationship. How did it start?

PETER MAY: It was way back in the 80's and I first noticed Arthur when he came back from Japan. His fighting stood out from the others at our National championships and we made a connection over the following years. I've always said that maybe there are contest fighters who have gone on to do a little more but as a fighter, Arthur was probably one of the best we've ever produced, with his movement and his boxing background.

ARTHUR MEEK: *We met in the UKKW, which was a thriving federation at the time and Peter was one of the senior instructors and at that time, as a young lad, to get support from someone as senior as Peter, I felt honoured because although I was facing tough opposition in those days I knew I had quality instruction and senior grades to help me.*

TRAD: what are your thoughts on the way the organisation split?

PETER MAY: I feel sadness that it fragmented into three groups because there are a lot of friends, even now, across the three groups but also, like anything in the martial arts, instructors have to evolve-Sakagami sensei, Shiomitsu sensei, Suzuki sensei, each one of them has had to go on and

evolve and sometimes I think these fragmentations are a natural progression. I must say, that the three organisations seem to be very strong.

ARTHUR MEEK: *Certainly, we didn't want it to happen because we felt that we were going to say goodbye to a lot of good friends but also, we were each loyal to our own instructors and we felt in many ways that we had to repay that loyalty because they had put so much trust in us and eventually, if instructors were to part, it was a natural progression really.*

PETER MAY: They were amazing times though, Malcolm! You had the hard training of Suzuki sensei, the technical training of Shiomitsu sensei and I got Sakagami sensei almost every day of the week. It was the most amazing times and I felt I'd got it all at that time.

ARTHUR MEEK: *Going back to the contest days, that was when everyone came together and you would see Crystal Palace packed to the rafters with the National and International championships and if you did well there then you had done well because of the magnitude and the calibre of people.*

TRAD: you both feel strongly, obviously, about the Japanese connection to your art as you are both right hand men to strong Japanese figures .



**Wado Warriors:
Arthur Meek (L)
& Peter May (R)**

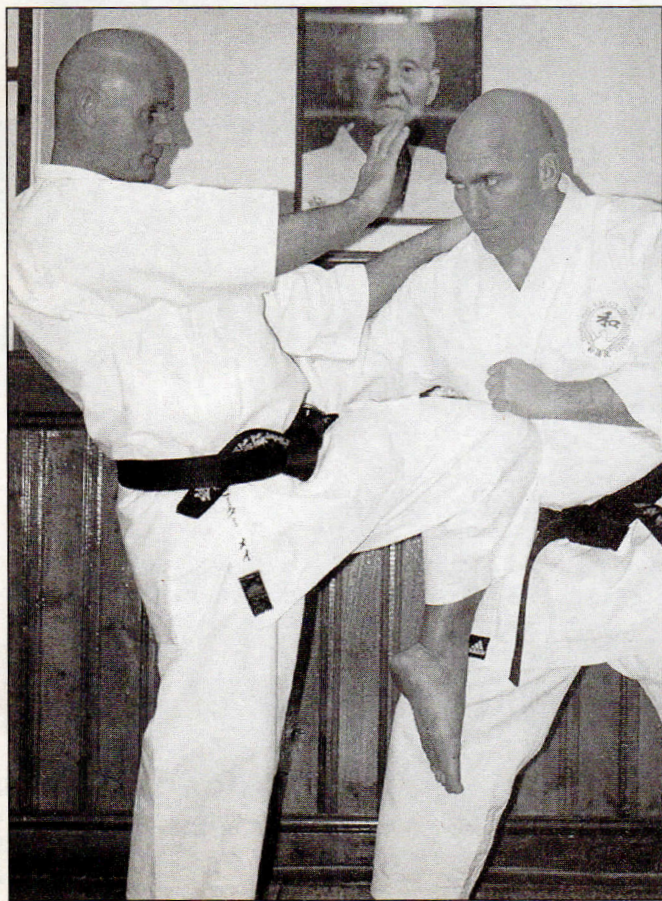
PETER MAY: How do you define loyalty?

ARTHUR MEEK: Well, certainly, going back to my early days, I trained in Japan and somebody put a lot of trust in me to go there and behave and it was only through facial recognition that Shiomitsu sensei finally said, okay I trust you to represent the UKKW, the British people if you like, to train in Japan. He didn't know me well enough but he put his trust in me and that was the first part of my loyalty. I didn't have to do it (be loyal), it was something I wanted to do. I wanted to put my faith in Shiomitsu sensei because he had put his faith in me. Also, as Peter has mentioned, his training has evolved and I love the way he trains and teaches, so the two go hand in hand, loyalty and the passion for martial arts.

PETER MAY: I think it's the same with me. I was a teenager when I first met Sakagami sensei and you're kind of at the crossroads at that age. I was looking for discipline, a mentor in life and he filled that role and he still is that mentor and although there's not that much difference in age, I still look up to him, in martial arts terms and life as well.

TRAD: do you think people still think that the Japanese force loyalty and obedience upon you?

PETER MAY: I heard a story of a Karateka who went to train at a Kobudo club and he was told that he must never look the Japanese instructor in the eye when they're explaining something and Sakagami sensei said that was a total misconception of his culture; it's quite the opposite.



ARTHUR MEEK: In fact, both Shiomitsu and Sakagami sensei are more westernised now than ever they were, they don't hold this I'm Japanese, you're British, therefore I'm senior idea, it doesn't come across that way at all. I have also read stories in magazines where students were unfairly treated by Japanese instructors but I think sometimes there was a little bit of misbehaviour going on and that of course, they won't tolerate, so the story cuts both ways.

TRAD: is it a tough responsibility being seen as the right hand man to a Japanese instructor?

ARTHUR MEEK: You mentioned this term in the last question and to be honest Malcolm I'm not the right hand man and I don't want to be put forward that way to anyone. There are senior instructors above me and we're all part of a wheel that helps turn the Academy-I have become a senior instructor but there are people far more senior than me and I think that Shiomitsu sensei looks at people all across the world as his right hand men, if you like, and we're supporting his cause to spread Wado, so I certainly don't feel that I'm in that category at all.

PETER MAY: I suppose people do look upon me as a right hand man because people do perceive me as the most senior British instructor but to be honest, I don't see myself that way. Arthur and myself were talking earlier on and we hate that idea of being like a Demigod to anyone. Yes, there is a lot of responsibility with being in a position like that but you should never take it too seriously.

TRAD: is it important to retain this Japanese connection as Karate evolves in this country?

ARTHUR MEEK: If you think about it, we've both trained with and sought instruction from British people. We started in a Japanese art and were lucky to have Japanese instructors and at the time they were the best instructors in this country. Arguably now, they may not be but certainly, from a Wado point of view, Shiomitsu sensei teaches me what I want but I have gone into other areas of training-I recently did an Erik Poulson grappling course because I'm interested in grappling.

PETER MAY: I'm the same-I choose to train with Sakagami sensei. I talked to him prior to this interview and told him I was doing it with Arthur and he said 'Arthur is his own man' and I thought that was good but I also think of myself as my own man, Sakagami sensei is my teacher but I am my own person as well. If you just follow one way, I don't think you evolve, you have to find connections and common denominators and put it together; that's how you evolve in the martial arts.

TRAD: the MMA scene has a mixed reputation but it has brought fighting arts back to the fore-they seem to have inaugurated an incredible evolution, maybe revolution, even.

ARTHUR MEEK: I'll sit and watch all those fights, UFC, Pride, K1, I think it's exciting and in my personal training.

even going back to when I was a green belt, I wanted to put something into my partner work or kata that felt like I was fighting, I didn't want to just learn the techniques, I wanted to feel that the techniques were working and I think that's important now. Whatever I learn, whatever I practice, I ask, does this work? Can I make this work? And if it doesn't work, keep working on it until it does, perhaps, rather than discard it. Reality is what we're looking at in our own Karate.

PETER MAY: I'm a big MMA fan; in fact, I've got a wide MMA DVD collection and in honesty, there's nothing new in martial arts, its always been there, it's just now how it's evolved to this MMA fighting, you can now see what does and doesn't work, first hand and I just love it. I wish it had been around 25 years ago and, like Arthur, I feel it has to be reality based.

TRAD: how much of that can be found in your Wado?

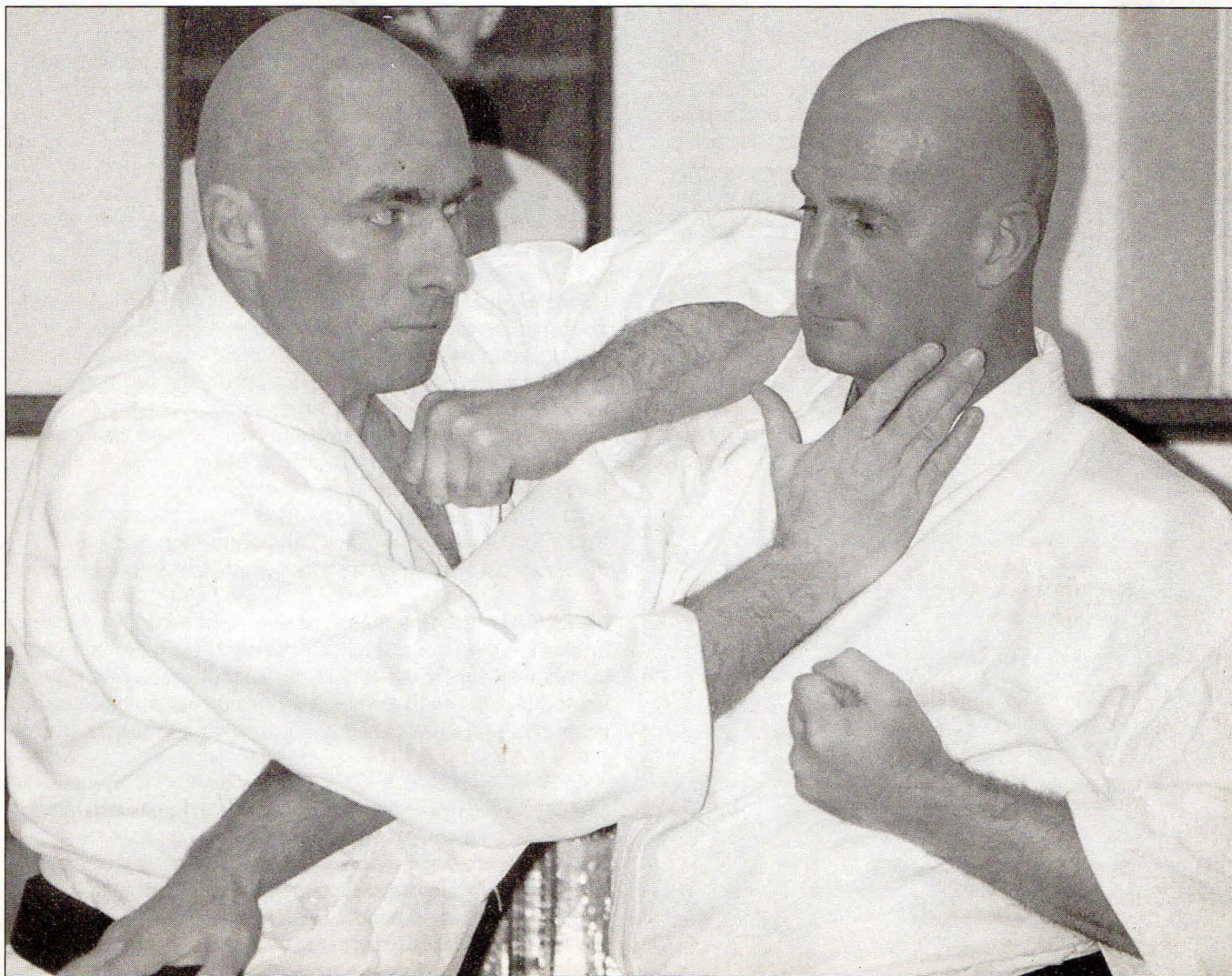
PETER MAY: I've always aid that Wado gives you the perfect base to work from. It's so flexible and if you practice good Wado with good teachers then you can almost pick any art up and find those common denominators.

ARTHUR MEEK: As Peter touched upon, a lot of it comes down to the instructor. We tend to sometimes wander away from the fighting element of the art before realising we need to get back to it. We have techniques that we need to understand for our grading and our Karate development but we have to make sure that they are functional and it's an integral part of your training that you fight regularly.

TRAD: different organisations, same Wado?

ARTHUR MEEK: Of course not, because you have different characters who lead the associations and they have slightly different twists on techniques and we learnt to accept that even back in the 80's. One weekend we would train with Shiomitsu sensei, another with Sakagami sensei, and another with Suzuki sensei and they would all be teaching us slightly different variations of a technique and you just learned to adapt. We did it back then and we can still do it now.

PETER MAY: Arthur's spot on there. Even on one technique you could go to the 3 instructors and there would be a different spin and you just learn to adapt. For some students it was a big problem, they wanted it written in stone or blood and they couldn't adapt but that's what I found interesting training



with three sensei; it gave you an overall view of a technique, times that by 1000 and that makes you a flexible person!

TRAD: so, it's not wrong, just different and does that mean that eventually your own perspective will be added to that?

ARTHUR MEEK: I'm sure we will, we're different people and every style has instructors who have a different way of teaching, different emphasis, so their students will stick to the basics but still have a slight slant from their instructors.

PETER MAY: For example, if I'm teaching Seishan Kata I get lots of students saying how did you learn all this stuff from Seishan; it's not what I've learnt from Seishan, it's what I've put back into it from the influence of everything else I've learnt!

TRAD: how have you seen your personal attitudes and philosophies change over the years?

PETER MAY: I try to train harder now than I've ever done. Okay, your body does tend to let you down as you get older, that's a fact of life, but your spirit and your mindset gets stronger. Last year I was training six days a week, six hours a day, I had to cut back to thirty hours because my body was seizing up on me but mentally you do get stronger.

ARTHUR MEEK: As we get older we do tend to look around and see how the different arts can be blended into Wado and vice-versa. There's a myriad of techniques out



there to learn and to develop and coming from a contest background myself, it would have been easy for me to finish my contest career and find something else to do but I think a contest fighter should take what he's learnt into his instruction and his further development in Karate. I train and learn on a daily basis, it's all part of your weekly schedule and variation in training is another important factor.

TRAD: you both have students in other disciplines; Arthur in Kickboxing, Peter in MMA. Do you keep that separate from your core art?

ARTHUR MEEK: My karate comes into the Kickboxing an awful lot because the movement I see in Wado can easily fit into a kickboxing ring; the body movement and don't forget that Wado has always been expressed as a yielding art, you see Thai boxers and certain other styles of Karate sometimes block with their arm or their leg but Wado has this unique movement, like a good boxer, to avoid that technique in the first place and then counter quickly. So, when I teach Kickboxing, I'm just teaching another Karate class sometimes.

PETER MAY: Again, it's exactly as Arthur says, the tai-sabaki element, is what I teach these guys. When they go into their normal fighting they start using tai-sabaki and the other MMA artists have trouble with that. I'm sure it'll get worked out eventually but at this moment they're catching everybody with that.

TRAD: you seem to be as enthusiastic now as you ever were; what does the future hold for you?

PETER MAY: I just don't see it ending, I never, from day one, set a finish line on what I'm doing. For me this is life and I can never see a time when I'm not doing Karate. It challenges me every day and I question it every day, I wouldn't be human if I didn't. Coming down here, I've been excited for a couple of days, meeting up with Arthur because I knew we come from similar backgrounds, we've got a similar bonding and even though I haven't seen Arthur for a few years, I knew it was going to be a good day. That helps.

ARTHUR MEEK: There's no explanation sometimes as to why we train, we just do it, whether it's traditional Karate, Kata, partner work, rolling on the floor with somebody, going for a run, we just do it. Why? (Both AM and PM laugh!)

PETER MAY: Before we go Malcolm, on behalf of the Wado Kai Association, we'd like to send condolences to Hayakawa sensei's family. Hayakawa sensei was my first teacher in 1969 and I'll never ever forget that he first showed me the way on the path. It's sad that he passed away.

ARTHUR MEEK: The same feelings obviously from myself and my colleagues to Hayakawa sensei's friends and family.

TRAD: Then both men went into the dojo to train with each other; something they'd been looking forward to all morning, a session that lasted the whole afternoon. Peter May and Arthur Meek; Wado warriors.