

Koshiki No Te

Traditional Martial Arts, Issue no. 1

Kuniaki Sakagami "Iron Sharpens Iron"

Evolution of Karate "Birth in Okinawa-Death in Olympics"

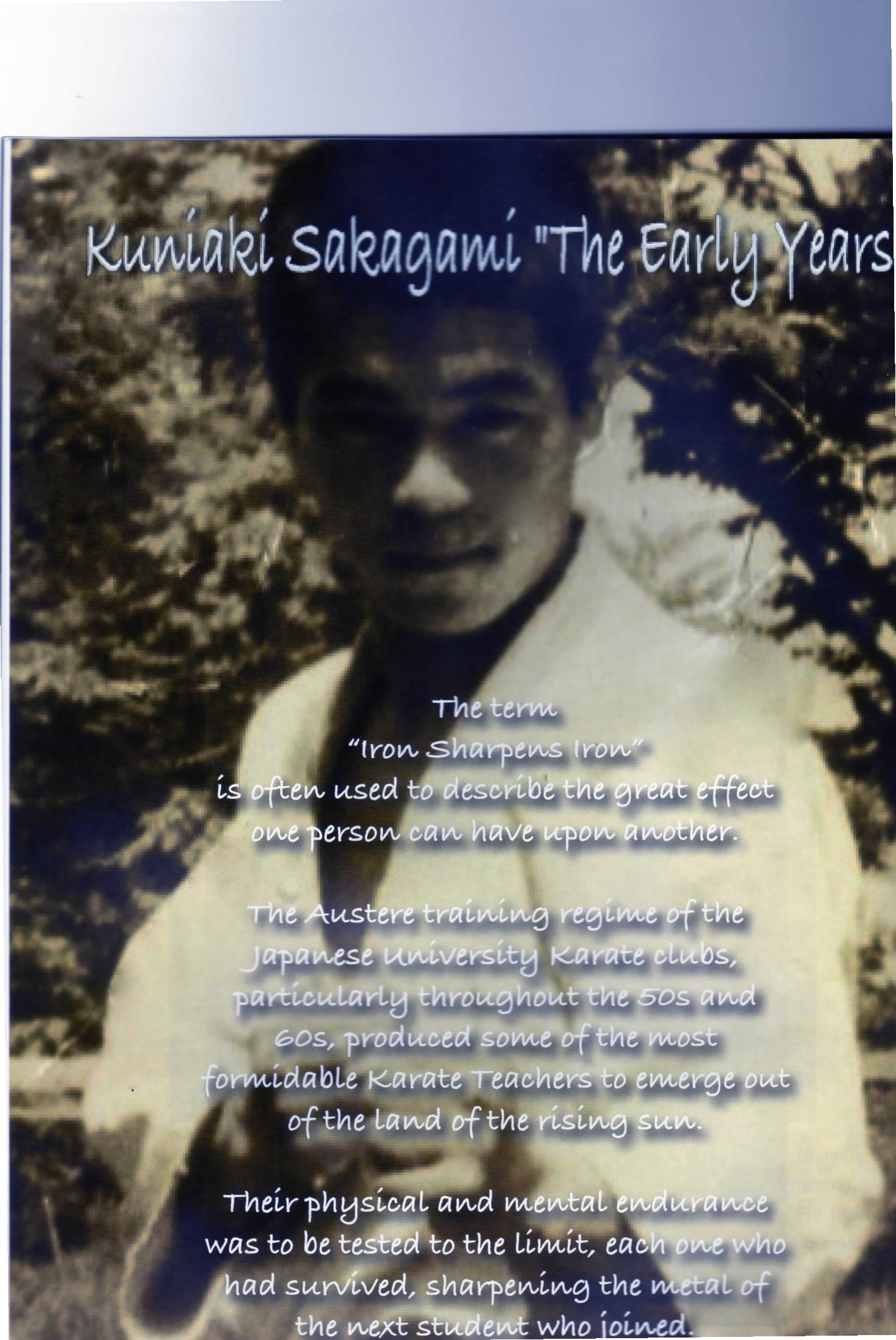
Masahiro Yanagawa "Master of Budo Karate"

Sanchin "The Heart of Naha-Te"

Shugyo "The Austerer Discipline"

Bunbu Ryodo "The Pen and Sword in Harmony"





Kuniaki Sakagami "The Early Years"

The term
"Iron Sharpens Iron"
is often used to describe the great effect
one person can have upon another.

The Austere training regime of the
Japanese University Karate clubs,
particularly throughout the 50s and
60s, produced some of the most
formidable Karate Teachers to emerge out
of the land of the rising sun.

Their physical and mental endurance
was to be tested to the limit, each one who
had survived, sharpening the metal of
the next student who joined.

I was born October 18th 1944 in to a farming community. Things were obviously different back then. As a young boy, unlike in these modern times, I didn't go to nursery school, but at 3 or 4 years of age I started primary school. At the age of six Japan was still under American occupation. This would have been around 1951. The following year, when I was in the second year of school, the American occupation ended and Japan became independent once again.

I do not remember much about the occupation, however, I remember walking to and from my primary school that was about a mile and a half from my home (walking to school was not like today where parents take their children to school, it was safe to walk alone as a children back then) me and fellow students often saw American G.I's driving their military jeep around. We would hide in the bushes when we saw them because our elders would say 'be careful if you see American soldiers because they will take you away'. You could now say that was laughable, but this is what we were told by our elders so we were quite scared of the site of the American G.I's.

I don't really know how the older generation viewed the occupation. They didn't talk much about these times, probably because my Father served in the Army, and came back safely from the war. Of course they were Adults and knew what was going on.

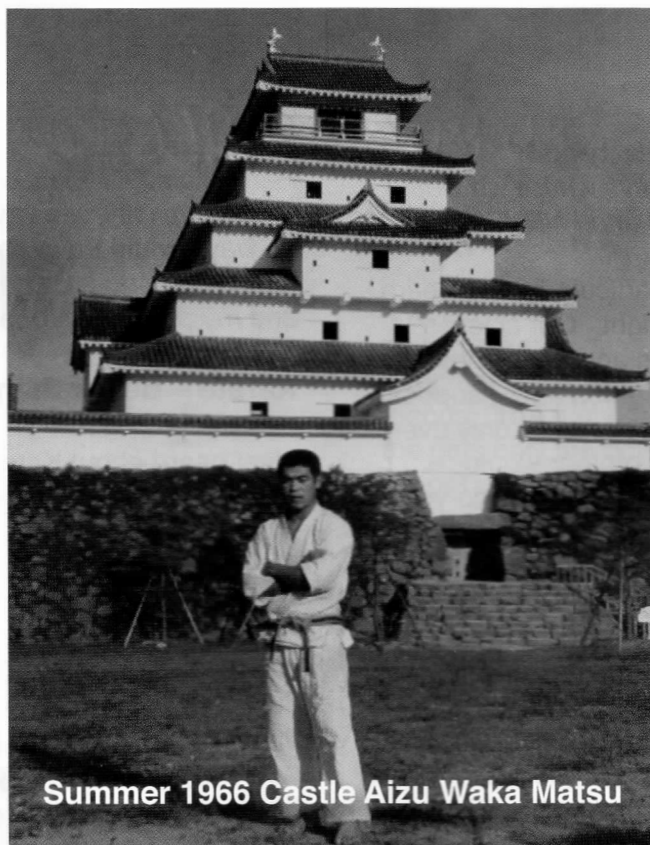
Like most Japanese Adults at the time, they knew Japan was badly defeated by the Americans, so I believe national pride was severely dented and the war was not something that was talked about. My Father, during his Military Service in the Army, was a horse trainer for the Officer Corp. as well as a Kendo instructor although on a small scale to one of the regiments. He never talked much about the war; it was just something we didn't talk about. He really wanted to focus on making the farming business successful.

The Family Farm

My Father was the ninth generation owner of the farm, so my brother is currently the tenth. The story goes that the farm has been passed down since the Samurai times of the 17th – 18th Century where the farm owner was the village head called Shoya, not head of the Samurai Clan, but of the village. My ancestors, as the village heads, would have owned far more land than the villagers or peasants farmers. As a seven year old, having returned to the farm from school at around 4pm, I would go outside to play games with friends. I have memories of playing hide and seek also Samurai games wearing and wielding wooded swords and imagining we were Samurai. Some of my school friends acted as the baddies (we were all fans of Chanbara - Samurai films) and we would dress up in masks and re-enact the films we had watched. Occasionally we would play Sumo wrestling. Looking back it was childish but very enjoyable, and later, at the age of ten years of age, I got hooked on Baseball.

Most weekends I would help out on the farm. I didn't like it, but my grandparents especially my grandmother told me 'do some help' so I would help collect and put the Potatoes into a basket and carry them to the house. Sometimes we went to the rice fields putting the rice seeds into the paddy. At the time most of the Adults worked in these soggy wet fields up to their knees in mud, so for a young boy this was extremely hard work even walking in the mud was exhausting. The one thing that concerned me about the rice fields

was the venomous snakes. They were drawn to the wet conditions, especially the snake called Mamushi. This snake is a particular dangerous and if you are bitten you must go to hospital immediately. Today this is not too bad as we have a good transport system, but in those days we had to ride our bikes to the hospital, with the wound if we were bitten. I particularly remember one farmer who was bitten on his lower arm. He had to tie string around his bicep tightly to stop the poison spreading into his system. He then rode off on his bicycle to receive treatment. They say you have to be treated within one hour or the bite can be fatal.



Summer 1966 Castle Aizu Waka Matsu



Sakagami 1964

The Boxing Dream

My first interest in the combat arts came from a featherweight Boxing World Champion, an American called Sandy Saddler. He was very famous and he came to Japan to fight ten rounds against the Japanese boxer Kaneko, who at the time was the Orient Pacific Champion, ranked 9th or 10th in the World. Within 3 rounds Saddler knocked Kaneko out. This event was broadcast by radio, and I was so excited listening to this Boxing match. I had never heard anything like it! This was in 1957, before Television. The commentator to the Boxing match remarked on how much Sandy Saddler would earn from the fight, so much money... I never realised anyone could earn that kind of money. This is when I decided I wanted to become a Boxer! So this was the fight that attracted me to the combat arts.

At twelve years of age, I started looking for a Boxing gym learning about other Boxing Champions such as Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson, mainly American Champions. Unfortunately there were no local Boxing gym's, and I can remember asking my friends if they knew of any Boxing camps but nobody seemed to be able to help me. However, it wasn't long before I could name all the World title Boxing Champions.

My home was situated in a small village about 10 miles from the centre of Toyahashi City. Now travelling this distance today is nothing, but in those days there were no cars around and the only way to get into the city was by bus. The buses stopped operating at 8pm and at that time Toyahashi City's population was around 250,000 (about the size of Wolverhampton) so I thought there must be a boxing gym there, but sadly this was not the case. The nearest boxing gym turned out to be in Hamamatsu City, about 25 miles from where I lived or Nagoya City, which was 50 mile away. There was no way I could travel that kind of distance so my hopes of being a Boxing Champion were dashed and my plan abandoned.

Karate – Better than Boxing?

I first heard about Karate around 1959 in my last year in high school. I heard from one of my friends that there was a Karate Dojo in Toyahashi City. My friend also told me that Karate was much, much better than boxing because you can do kicks and punches, use your elbows and knees, and is much stronger than boxing. I asked 'well what about Judo?' 'No, no!' my friend said 'It's much better than Judo!' and at that time information was scarce and it was easy for young people to be carried away with this fantasy.

The High School Years

At secondary school I became involved in a lot of sporting activities. My main three sports were Baseball (obviously my favourite!) then Athletics and as you know I was a very good sprinter 100 metres – 200 meters [*I believe Sensei is trying to remind me of training in our younger days where we would often include 100 metre sprints and I NEVER did beat him*] and also Volleyball.

Hmm... Looking back I didn't particularly study hard but academically I was quite bright. Our classes normally consisted of fifty pupils and I somehow always managed to end up in the top ten. I suppose I was better than average but realistically only ever did enough to get by. My older brother would always telling me off for not studying hard, 'do your homework!' he used to say but I would just pretend; my mind was always on sports, not academic studies. Back in those school days, I did get into scrapes and fights but these were rarely malicious. Yes, fights broke out quite often over disagreements, but the next day we were always friends again. It's not like today where a lot of kids hold grudges. We were just excitable, lots of grabbing and punching, and sometimes spitting. One time I did go too far though and I punched one boy a little too much.

low, I had never seen Karate in live action, the only thing I had seen was in books. There were a few to be found in local bookshops, one book that comes to mind was about an Okinawan style written by Hanken Toyama who was Okinawan, but resided in Japan. I believe the book was about a Shurite style and similar to Shorin ryu.

It wasn't long after being told about the Dojo that I joined the Toyahashi Shibu (Wado kai branch) run by Tetsuo Suzuki Sensei. I fully joined the Dojo in 1960 just before I finished High School.



Sakagami
Winter 1965 using tree as makiwara

Toyahashi Shibu City Dojo

When I joined the Dojo I was the youngest student. We regularly had between 15 to 20 students training at any given time, so it was only a small Dojo. Suzuki sensei was resident in Hamamatsu City so he used to visit our Dojo twice a month. The resident instructor really was the most Senior student in the Dojo, his name was Mr Tomita. He was a second Dan. First Dan, Mr Oyabi, also helped with the instruction. Incidentally Mr Oyabi was brown belt when I joined and quickly progressed to black belt. He still trains today and is still active in Toyahashi City.

He is my senior by about 4 years and he is the only one left from that Dojo other than me. I remember Oyabi Sempai to be very good in basics and Kata. His free fighting was not so strong although he was not so big, a little smaller than me but his kata was exceptionally good, probably at that time he was better than me. He won the first ever kata event at the Tokai area championships.

The training at the city Dojo was physically hard, always lots of basics and the lesson lasted two hours or so. Basics would be performed for 1 hour, then kata for half an hour, pair work for fifteen minutes than free fighting for the remainder. I suppose it was physically challenging but it was nothing like the mental and physical training that I was about to undertake at Aichi University where we experienced a constant pressure from the club Sempai's (senior students).

I didn't really witness any bad incidents or injuries at the city dojo, just the normal bloody noses and cut eyes, however later at University....

Why Karate?

I tell you why most people started Karate at that time. They started Karate, now they may not admit it, but they started to be strong and take care of themselves in a street situation. I personally was of small stature, even by Japanese standards, so I was easy pickings for some of the shady characters. Mind you, that soon was to change when I was full throttle in Karate. Students would come to our high school from all over Japan. Some were not of good character, always looking for trouble, and always looking for easy victims. Sometimes they would demand money and I didn't want to be victim to these people.

Today Japan is generally a very safe place, but back then I remember these high school bad boys would go to the city and gang up on people in the middle of the street. They would drag people into the shadows of the building, demanding money or jewellery, and then they would be off to the local pawn broker to cash in their findings. This was quite a regular occurrence and often happened to my friends. The funny thing is this never happened to the girls only the boys... These bad boys were like junior borderline Yakuza (Gangster's) and looking back, no-one would report these attacks to the Police as they felt ashamed and embarrassed that they had been robbed by fellow high school students. So, this was the main reason I started Karate.

I didn't want to be picked on! In fact, I tell you, when I was brown belt in Karate I was picked on by two of these boys and had to protect myself! I still remember at the time feeling this is why and what I started Karate for.

These two bad guys took me into the shadows between two buildings down a very narrow street and demanded money from me. They demanded about 300 yen (in those days two people could have a nice meal with that amount of money) and my response was a swift maigeri (front kick) and a punch to the main bad guy and as he went down I did kick him a couple times more. I never touched the other guy, he just put his hands in the air and surrendered and said 'please not me, not me'. An unfortunate incident, but also a reassurance that the karate I was learning was effective.

Aichi University Years

I then went on to Aichi University to study Economics, but my main reason for choosing Aichi was to pursue my Karate training under Suzuki sensei as he was the Shihan for the Wadokai Karate club there. When I joined Aichi University club as a university student I had already been training at the club for two years. Aichi would accept some of the talented high school boys who trained in karate so, a couple of other high school students and I would train there regularly. As High School student the sempai's and University students were not that hard on us, however that all changed when we became full time students.

Aichi University Years - Mr Suzuki

Apart from Ohtsuka sensei, whose ability we never talked about because of our respect for him, Suzuki sensei was simply regarded as the best in Wado, and at that time this was my belief. When I started Karate, Suzuki sensei was 32 or 33 years of age, physically I believe at his peak, the speed of his kicks and punches was really amazing. Often Aichi University Sempai's always regarded Suzuki sensei as the best in Wado, his power and speed was absolutely outstanding.

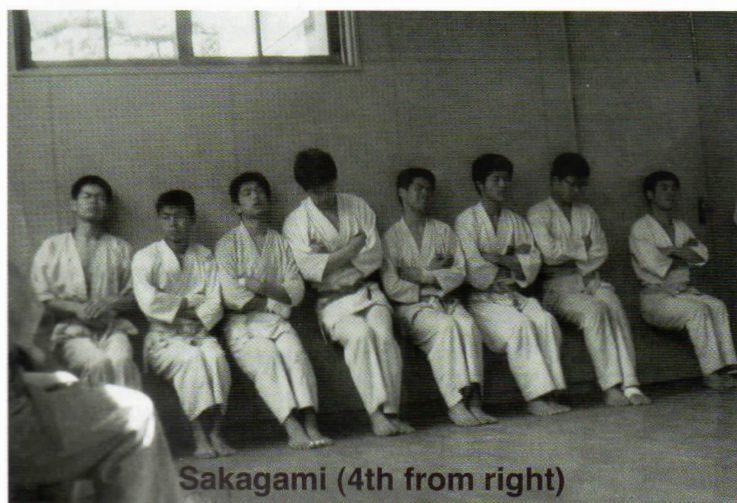


Suzuki sensei circa early 70s

Suzuki sensei's attitude towards the Aichi students was different to most of the other clubs he taught at for instance, the Toyahashi City Dojo was open to the public so his teaching was not so severe or hard, but when it came to University training, it was a totally different attitude. So physically hard, and the mental training was constant pressure. Suzuki sensei taught at several University Karate clubs including Meijo University, Nagoya University, and Tokyo University where Mr Takamizawa was studying Russian language. But Aichi University was Suzuki sensei's main University Dojo. I believe that this is why he trained the Aichi students so hard.

He told me one time 'I was strict and the training was so hard, because I loved Aichi University Karate Club'. Suzuki sensei taught at the club about three times a month, the regular teacher would be the captain of the University club.

In my first year this was Mr Eijima, my second year it was Mr Goto, my third year was Mr Junshiro Suzuki, and by my fourth year I was chosen to be Captain.



Sakagami (4th from right)
1963 Spring Training Camp
leg strengthening
1st yr student amongst a group of
2nd yr students



**Suzuki sensei, Sakagami sensei
Crystal Palace circa 1980's**

Aichi University Years:- The Karate Club Captains

Team captain Mr Eigima – He was three years my senior and later we would work for the same shipping company. He was an excellent free fighter, in-fact Mr Suzuki wanted Mr Eigima to come to Europe, but at the time Mr Eigima is what we called an "established salary man! so he was settled with his job and he was about to be married.

This made him reluctant to take up Mr Suzuki's offer so Mr Suzuki asked Mr Sugiura "if not Mr Eigima, can you find someone else?! This is how I got recommended for Europe. Many years later I asked Mr Eigima why he didn't take a teaching post in Europe.

He reiterated about being settled but he also added that after leaving Aichi University he had found it difficult to train, had lost a little confidence, and knew that whilst I was young and working, I was still managing to train every day and it was him that recommended me to Mr Sugiura for the teaching post in Germany. Team captain Mr Goto - There were two Mr Gotos at the club at the time, both were the same age, one was Captain, the other was vice Captain! Team Captain Goto - He was two years older than me, about my height and when he entered University he was already a black belt. However, like anyone else who joined the club as a black belt, regardless of their grade, he had to restart as a white belt. This would mean that everyone who started at the University was a beginner After one year's training he was allowed to wear his black belt again. This does not happen today and it is different. Today much of the University training is about competition, back then it was about training karate.

Junshiro Suzuki We became close friends. He came from a wealthy family, his father was a Doctor and his eldest brother held a high position in the police force prosecuting criminals. I remember Suzuki sempai had a little fight at an Autumn Japanese Festival with some local Yakuza. I believe punches were exchanged (it is well known that the Yakuza hold grudges so later on they visited his house with about half a dozen more Yakuza looking for Suzuki sempai.) His Mother showed no fear and told them that if they caused any further trouble she would call her eldest son. This seemed to dampen things down for a while!



**Disappointed Aichi University team
after losing to Hosei University
Their skinhead haircut their penance**

Aichi University Years - Yakuza versus Mr T.

It seems younger people like the 'Hollywood Yakuza' image which may be influenced by films of our generation. If you look at the Godfather film it looks like the family is a good family, but the reality is, it's really not like that at all.

In my younger days a few karate students had confrontations with Yakuza. I remember an incident involving a senior student two years my Sempai (I believe he may still be around so we will call him Mr T just in case!), Mr T. who was a fourth year student at the time. In Japan fourth year students do not train to the end of Graduation, which is normally March time. They train until Christmas and it is at this time that the Karate club is handed over to the third year students (this includes the handing over of captancy). So, Mr T. was no longer training at Aichi Dojo and was at a local bar with his friends from the Judo club. Somehow, at the bar, an argument broke out between the Aichi boys and some local Yakuza gangsters. They decided to take matters outside and as they stepped through the doorway the argument got more heated with pushing and shoving. Mr T. kicked the Yakuza in the head with mawashigeri jodan. Trouble was, Mr T. was wearing wooden geta that knocked the Yakuza clean out, cutting his head quite badly. The Aichi boys and Mr T. quickly retreated! Later on the Yakuza would return to their office, their pride badly hurt, and vowed revenge on Mr T.

The Yakuza gang started checking up on the students of Aichi University looking around the campus for Mr T. They failed to realise that Mr T. had now left the Karate club dojo and decided that he must be Judo practitioner due to the stocky build of his friends who were at the bar with him at the time. It wasn't long before three Yakuza turned up at the Judo club. The main gangster who had been kicked, had his head and half his badly swollen face bandaged. All of them were carrying katanas.

They demanded to see Mr T. shouting at the students to bring Mr T. to them. The Judo students told the gangsters that Mr T. was with the Judo students at the time of the argument but did not belong to their club. Mr T. knew the gangsters were looking for him and he didn't want to cause any trouble for the University Karate club. The gangsters continued to look for Mr T. and they would not give up due to the loss of face.

They just kept searching for him even though he lived in Okazaki which was about 25 miles from Toyahashi City.

Eventually Mr T. best friend from the Judo club, Mr Sowa (who was from Osaka and whose father was high ranked in the Osaka Yakuza family) asked his father to mediate as there was no way out of this situation for Mr T. Most of the Yakuza in Japan are some way connected with each other so Mr Sowa's Father met with the Oyabun (Godfather) of the Toyahashi City Yakuza. Mr Sowa's Father listened to both sides of the story. He told Mr T. that he should not have done what he did, 'you are a young student, not a gangster!' he told him in 'and in no uncertain terms should you have beaten up this Yakuza in a public place so as to endanger many people, allowing them to link other innocent people to you'.

Mr T. was told that he had to go to the Yakuza and apologise. Through Mr Sowa's father, the injured Yakuza was told that Mr T. was a young student who still had his future ahead of him. Mr T. went to the Yakuza office with half a dozen bottles of expensive Black Label Whisky as a peace offering. With the Yakuza family it is all about saving face, so even after an event has all been smoothed over, the Yakuza ranked below the one that had been injured, still wanted to kill Mr T. The lower ranked Yakuza were begging the higher ranked Aniki (big brother) to allow them to 'finish him off'. But the Toyahashi Oyabun told them sternly that both family's had now reached an agreement and that 'that was the end of the matter'. I believe Mr Sowa's father had handed over some cash, so in reality Mr T. was a very lucky man as I have no doubt his life would have ended at a very young age.



August 1963 Summer Camp,
Sakagami 9th from left top row

Aichi University Years Mr Matsui and Mr Sugiura

To be honest I never saw a lot of Mr Matsui during my University life. Matsui sensei got involved with the club a little later on. Mr Sugiura quite often came to train us. I really liked his training. Sugiura sensei would have been between 28 and 32 years of age and during my period at Aichi he came about once a month. Mr Sugiura was kohai (junior) to Mr Suzuki and regarded as one of the Aichi coaches. I liked Mr Sugiura's training as during his high school days he was a second Dan in Judo before he started his karate training. During his Judo training he damaged his left knee which hindered him kicking well with this leg, so he trained hard to develop his right kick, and being left handed he fought on his strong side. He had very good footwork, very light, smooth, fluid movement and he also had an excellent left uraken and right front kick.



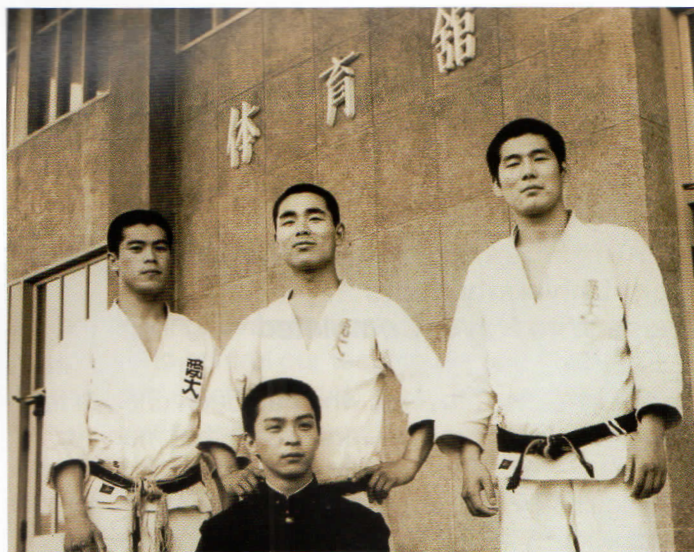
(L - R)
Matsui - P. May - Segiura - Sakagami

All the students loved Mr Segiura. One of the reasons why was his kindness. He trained us hard yet he always looked after us. After training he would always take us to town and bought us meals and drinks. He looked after us so well and his generosity never changed though out his life. I remember as students, money was scarce, so going out for a meal was a luxury. Sometimes we would see Segiura sensei in town where we would greet him loudly even from across the street. As was the Japanese custom typical of those times in Japan he would never see us go hungry. He was the 'big' Sempai and a working man; we were the lowly Kohai, but he always made sure we had food. He probably was one of the most favourite Sempai's! He was very generous to all the students and he never did change. He still possessed the same generosity until his passing a few years ago.

Aichi University Years A Weekly Training Programme

First of all we would do half an hour of jogging, then straight into makiwara training. Outside the dojo there were ten makiwara boards where we would hit the makiwara 100 times with each technique. Our training from Monday to Friday was from 2.30pm until 6.30pm. We would start with basic technique for around forty-five minutes then it was onto Kata. Because of Suzuki sensei's influence we practised Kata quite a lot. Kihon Gumite was practised every other day, and we also practised Suzuki sensei's Ohyo Gumite. We then did sparring techniques or techniques that were suitable to competition fighting, then always 30 minutes of free fighting. As first year students' we hated free fighting as we were not allowed to fight one-another, we had to always fight the Sempai's where we were practically treated as punch bags!

I have thought about why we received such treatment from our seniors and have decided it was a culture thing. I believe training in Japan has since changed but when I was at university we were not only expected to train but also look after the needs of our seniors. We would have to clean the dojo, take our Sempai's Gi home to wash, iron and return it for the next day of training. This was what was expected, it was our duty. I do not think that all university karate clubs did this however, traditionally strong clubs did or had similar unwritten rules.



May 1966 after Championships with
Team Members
(L - R)
Sakagami - Miura - Kayeba
(Front)
Nagal

Aichi University Years **The Sempai – Kohai Relationship**

Ohtsuka sensei introduced karate to universities for prestige and as a way of spreading Wado around the country. I do not believe that the austere treatment of kohai's was something that he initiated. I cannot say for sure but I do not think this was the case before the war. At the time of the war there were only a few universities practicing karate. I know that the universities practising Wado included maybe Tokyo University, Nodai University, Nihon Dental College, Meijo University and the teachers college Kyoiku University. There was only five or six; even Nihon's university club didn't start until after the war.

I believe that tough training handed out by the Sempai's to the kohai's had always existed but to what degree before the War, I'm not sure. Pre-war students were meant to be disciplined in this manner, even ordinary students. This was not just prevalent in karate but in all society, but make no mistake, after the war all sports clubs became extremely disciplined, even athletics, swimming and volleyball, any university that had strong sporting clubs employed this severe discipline.

This may have been as an attempt to rebuild national spirit and yes, the discipline was important. Post war Japan tried to invigorate the Samurai spirit. The Military used a system which was very much class based. 1st ranked was the lower Samurai, 2nd ranked was the middle Samurai and 3rd ranked the high Samurai. It would seem that the universities inherited this Samurai class system. Even the university baseball clubs 1st year to 4th year was based on a class ranking system. Also, whilst training, you never dare address your senior by his first name; you would always respectfully use their surname with Sempai.

Aichi University Years **Those Who Never Completed**

I was one of two students who had been chosen to train previously at the university club, but many of the new recruits had virtually no experience of training like we did. I remember one student who came from Kyu Shu; he has already been training in Karate for some time and had achieved Blackbelt. His name was Mr Nakakura.

He was a good guy, but he was shocked at how hard the training was. Looking back now it saddens me to think that he even quit university because of it. I suppose as young men we could take the physical pressures but I believe it was the mental pressures that were so different to ordinary city karate clubs. Approximately 120 students would start at the club at the beginning of the year.

Obviously this was viewed as too many and virtual every week students would quit.

I suppose the Sempai's did care that these students left but on the other hand they instinctively knew who would last and who would leave. After all, they had gone through the same process. It really was a continual test both physically and mentally. If you wished to achieve anything at the Aichi University Karate Club you had to perceive, you had to go through the minefield to survive...

Looking back now some of the students who had the potential to do well, the really good ones, physically capable and extremely fit, even they struggled. I remember one student in particular; he was a Judo 3rd Dan, a good strong guy, well built but didn't last. Another guy who was over six foot tall, even he couldn't last. It was such a shame that karate lost these students. I also remember one of my friends from high school who joined Aichi the same time as me, he was also well built, nearly 6 foot tall, his fighting was very strong, but he was quite soft in his heart. He also quit. Many potential good students just didn't last.

Aichi University Years **The Pain of Yada's Pachinko Honesty**

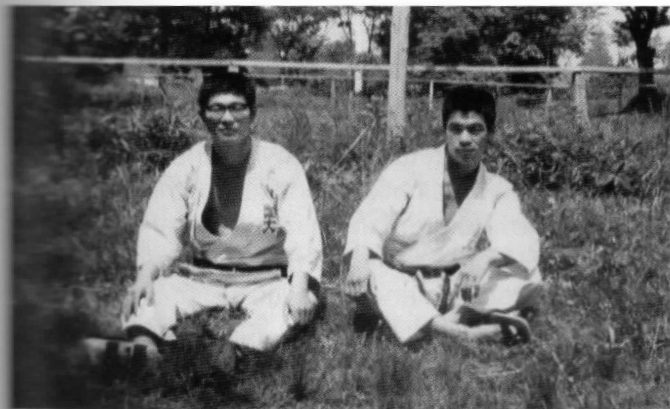
I recall one student, his name was Yada. We were first year students. Saturday morning's training always started dead on the time at 10.30am. Now Mr Yada lived about forty miles away and did not live on the University campus. He had to commute every day. This one Saturday morning he came to training fifteen minutes late. We had already started practising basics. I could see Mr Yada's head peering around the entrance to the Dojo.

The vice Captain Mr Goto asked him were had he been, 'what was your problem that you could not make training on time?' Mr Yada just bowed his head and whispered 'I went to the pachinko parlour. I heard the whole class groan... even I groaned! It probably would have been the equivalent of the modern day 'OH MY GOD!' because straight away

we knew what would happen. I can laugh now but at the time it was deadly serious. All training was stopped. The other Mr Goto who was team captain at the time, ordered all the first year students to kneel in a straight line and for one hour we had to seiza. The rest of the class, (the second, third and fourth year students), continued to train verbally abusing Mr Yada as they practiced. They would ask 'So Mr Yada were you winning?', 'yes sempai', the smack, he would get hit with the open hand. 'So Mr Yada, were you there a long time?', 'yes sempai', smack, he would get hit again.

'So Mr Yada, do you play pachinko very often', 'yes sempai', smack, another hit and then another, and another. His body would fall left to right depending on who had hit him. We were all whispering under our breath 'baka' (stupid) why didn't he just tell a little white lie to save him and us from the punishment?' At least you would have thought, when asked, 'do you play pachinko very often?' he would have said 'not really, maybe once a week' (sometimes being totally honest, especially in these circumstances, just does not pay off!). Then things went a little too far. Team vice captain Goto kicked Mr Yada full in the chest with a maigeri (front kick) whilst he was still kneeling. This knocked Mr Yada unconscious. Luckily he had not broken any bones but this was not the end of it. We all had extra hard free fighting. Poor Mr Yada fought ten sempai's one after another, and because it was Saturday there was no rush to finish. We were all beaten up. I have no idea how Mr Yada explained all the bruising to his parents. Back then one or two of the student's parents complained to the university authorities about the injuries obtained at the university clubs. The authorities would visit the club and ask the team captain 'what kind of training are you doing?' The authorities regarded it as a pre-war militaristic idea 'why are you practising in such an out dated way?' The Japanese army was known for treating its troops in this way with the hierarchy of the army misusing their authority against the foot soldiers. Looking back, ultimately this sort of thing just does not work.

I was once involved in such an incident as a fourth year student but it was purely an accident. If it is proved to be an accident the parents accept it. Mr Yada didn't last one year, he eventually quit.



Many students quit training in the same way. Some would come to the karate club and say to the club captain 'I wish to leave the Karate club' so on their final day of training the team captain would say 'ok so as from tomorrow you no longer come to train karate, so this is your last training session'. The captain would give the student a farewell present of free fighting.

They wouldn't knock the student out as that would be the end; instead the fighting was there to punish the student for leaving. They would not hit the face full force but to the body was as much as the student could take. Kicks, punches and sweeps. I also remember one such student who left the club calling out and crying for his mother. I feel now if this had been found out by the authorities, they would have closed the club down. I heard this sort of behaviour was still going on for about three years after I left. In fact the Aichi University club was suspended for three months at the time when I was teaching in Europe.



May 1966 individual kumite semi finals
Sakagami attacking Maegeri

Aichi University Years – Fighting

In free fighting, even in those days, we were supposed to control our techniques and I suppose, to a certain extent, we did. As fourth year students when sparring with the novice or rookie students, we could hit them hard if we had wanted, but for me I knew it was too easy to seriously hurt a rookie so I would hold back a little. They were allowed to go full out against seniors and could be clumsy, awkward and cumbersome, so sometimes I had to hit them a bit harder just to remind them what it was all about! When they got carried away they would resemble street fighters. It seemed to me that these rookies often got hurt as a result of one of them hitting a senior student. The sempai students who lost face by being hit by their kohai's, would occasionally let the kohai know.



Circa 1974

Aichi University Years - Gasshuku Revenge

One student did get badly hurt during free fighting. I remember that day well. It was during the spring break of our first year Mr Takouchi was physically smaller and lighter than me. I would not have called him very strong in karate but he practiced all the same. He trained in the Nagoya area Dojo and in those days the Nagoya Dojo was a branch of the Toyahashi City Dojo, all linked to Aichi University, very similar to today's campus. We all trained separately however we would all come together about five times a year for special Gasshuku training. This would normally consist of one week's extra hard training.

A sempai who was one year older than us, I still remember his name, it was Mr Yokota, punched Mr Takeuchi quite hard in the eye socket. To be honest he wasn't that outstanding but Mr Takeuchi was easy pickings. Mr Yokota was physically much bigger and Mr Takeuchi's punches and kicks were quite light in comparison. Mr Yokota's really should have controlled his technique but didn't and consequently hit Mr Takeuchi a couple of times on the same spot. Mr Takeuchi lost his eyesight. It did not happen straight away but over a period of a few months.

Mr Takeuchi had a couple of operations but his eyesight deteriorated very quickly until he was completely blind in his left eye. Now Mr Takeuchi came from a very wealthy family, in fact they were millionaires. His father owned a large factory that made components for the Toyota car company, so paying for specialist eye treatments and surgery by the best physicians was not a problem. However, having paid for all the treatments available, he just could not recover from the incident and gave up karate training.

I was really angry so in the October Gasshuku, just before the All Japan University Championships (shortly before I passed my first dan blackbelt), I made sure I met Mr Yokota who was now a third year student in free-sparring. Now I never told Mr Takeuchi about this next incident until many years later, in fact I never mentioned it until I was resident in the U.K! I really did batter Mr Yokota during that Gasshuku and it is very rare for the younger student to beat up their sempai, but I did.

In my mind I had vowed vengeance on Mr Yokota on behalf of Mr Takeuchi. Mr Takeuchi really was one of my best friends. It was a real shame what happened to him. As I have already mentioned it would be many years later before I told him about that day. We now exchange New Year's cards and when he is in the U.K. which is quite regularly, we meet up for a meal. Our friendship is still very close. He has now taken over the directorship of his family's factory.

Editors comment: This actually bought Sakagami sensei onto a point that really describes to me a pertinent point within Japanese culture and society. It also reminded me why he has driven Toyota cars for many years... After graduating from Aichi University he worked for a shipping company called Fujiki who shipped Toyota cars to various parts of the world. Sakagami sensei has been receiving a salary from Fujiki for at least the last ten years. The company does not have to do this, and even in Japan this is very rare, but the company owner Mr Ito (who was quite young around 29 years of age) also studied at Aichi University employed Sakagami sensei and two other university karate graduates. To say Sakagami sensei and Mr Ito were friends would not be correct, but he and the other graduates were often invited to Mr Ito's house to play Mahjong. Again a Sempai, Kohai relationship emerged. Sakagami sensei explains.

Looking back, Mr Ito had his own circle of 'friends' within the company but this sort of relationship really only happened in Japanese Society, especially in those days. I suppose I don't really like to refer to the Yakuza but it was a little like the Oyabun (Godfather) and the Kohai. We were accepted as his own men. Every year the Fujiki Company would take on Aichi University Graduates (and still does). They have now changed the company name to Fuji Transport Corporation and they were one of the sponsors for the 2010 World Wadokai Championships

Editors comment: This was through Sakagami sensei's connection to the Fuji Transport Company and Mr Matsui the World Wadokai Championship organiser).

Aichi University Years – Ohtsuka sensei

When Ohtsuka sensei would come and teach at the university, training wasn't really physical, it was more intellectual. In my first and second year at University, when I had limited knowledge about karate techniques or martial arts in general, I must confess, I wasn't that interested in the philosophical side of karate, probably due to my young age! We could hardly understand what Ohtsuka sensei was saying. He always talked about *teni - tentai - tengi* also *noru - inasu - nagasu*. The young students always questioned us on what he was saying 'what does he mean?' We would do ten minutes of basics then we would stand for 20 minutes whilst he would talk and try and explain his thought. Remember we were so young and this was such gentle training, both physically and mentally. It was easy compared to what we were used to. Also the Sempai students wouldn't dare shout at us in front of Ohtsuka sensei! Looking back now I feel we all missed a good opportunity and chance to learn Wado deeply. I remember Ohtsuka sensei mainly taught basic techniques, Kihon Gumite and nearly always Pinan Yondan. As young students we would comment 'we did Pinan Yondan last time didn't we?'

Occasionally we would practice Pinan Nidan and Pinan Shodan, but rarely, for some reason, did we practice Pinan Godan.

Ohtsuka mainly taught Niahanchi and Seishan as the advanced kata, and often said that Chintoh, is Seishans Ohyo (application). It really was hard to think how, and why, so his training left a lot of question marks. If I only had those times and days again! When Ohtsuka sensei came to teach in the U.K. all of the Japanese instructors held detailed technical discussions with him, but when I was in my student days it was not appropriate to ask too many questions.

He often mentioned Budo but in a very philosophical way. I can tell you one interesting thing; he never mentioned competition karate at all during my university days! Nothing was spoken about points or how to score with kicks and punches. He would tell us that we should 'beat your opponent, whatever the circumstances, beat your opposition, never score, you must win! As long as you win the battle, it doesn't matter how'.



Ohtsuka sensei demonstrating with Sakagami

Suzuki sensei would talk a lot about Ohtsuka sensei as he had more contact with him through his karate training in Japan. During my university days the only contact I had with Ohtsuka sensei was when he came to Aichi University, so really the things that we learned from him directly was quite limited.

A lot of the philosophy and technical teaching really went over our heads, and years later I remember Ohtsuka sensei telling me that 'Wado karate is not good'. I was so shocked and replied strongly 'what do you mean Sensei? Wado karate is not good?' I believe what he meant was if the instructor or teacher can do Wado, but the students can't follow then this cannot be a good thing. Wado Karate is technical and Ohtsuka sensei tried to teach the students a certain way. Do the techniques this way and that way, use the *Teni - Tentai - Tengi* theory. A lot of students seem to struggle to understand the technical subtleties, so looking back now Ohtsuka sensei's comment on Wado being the worst really meant he felt technically it was the best, but the most difficult to master.

He once said that he was frustrated that he could not teach all that he knew. This was not directed at just western students, he also meant Japanese students, and really you would expect the Japanese students to understand more because of the Japanese language. But even they could not put it into practice. I believe it did frustrate him and I remember him saying that maybe he should have simplified Wado how some of the other styles of karate had done.

Looking Back - Ohtsuka sensei

With now over 50 years of Wado training, I still believe there was significant difference between Ohtsuka Sensei and his contemporaries. His technique and performance of the techniques just looked so different. Maybe it was an age thing. Young students in their early twenties and early thirties compared to a man who was coming up to seventy years of age. Naturally it looked different when performing techniques, but one thing I noticed was how and when he took Kamae (stance) he had presence. Somehow no one else could do Kamae like Ohtsuka sensei could. It looked so natural. Another thing I noticed was that Ohtsuka sensei (I can't say it was his favourite Kata), would practice Naihanchi quite often. When he stood in Naihanchi stance my impression at that time, and even later when he came to the U.K., he looked so different to the other instructors. Sensei's feet were like suckered to the floor. If you were to imagine an octopus, he looked so natural yet so grounded I asked Jiro Ohtsuka 'sensei, the Grandmasters feet when performing Niahanchi were as if stuck to the floor and yet so flexible, how can we replicate that?' and Jiro Ohtsuka replied 'only my Father can do that!'

Ohtsuka sensei's techniques, now I'm not saying he was a knockout puncher, but he had such fluidity resulting in graceful movement. This is hard to explain but when looking at his techniques it was like the old Japanese Art, Japanese Noh (referring to how the Japanese actor's flow across the stage it is as if they are floating). With this movement, the impression I got was that his technique and demonstration was so different to any other karate people regardless of style.

Ohtsuka sensei was so different to other masters and Wado teachers at the time. His karate, especially when you put it into a physical science or sports science context, was so ahead of his time, so advanced compared to other karate masters.

I feel he would have gone through a different transition in his development to other instructors to achieve what he did within wado karate.

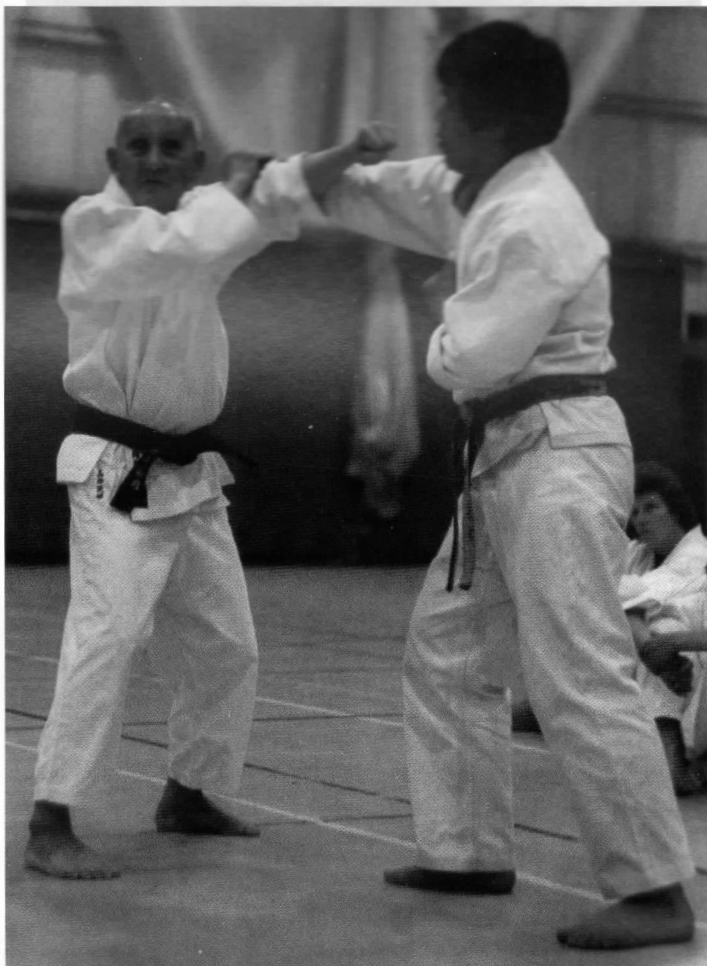
I have heard about these discussions on the internet regarding Su Ha Ri and how Ohtsuka sensei accomplished this. The people discussing this today often indicate that they feel as though they have reached the Ri stage themselves. They have not. It is not as easy as they seem to interpret Su Ha Ri or what it says on paper. In my mind you really have to have super abilities to reach this kind of level and I can only really give my opinion for Wado.

Looking Back - Ohtsuka Sensei and Budo

One of Wado's fortes is the Shai kumite. We have excelled in the competition arena for so many years but not in the kata. I feel that Ohtsuka sensei's teachings were Budo based, not competition based.

Editors comment: You have now over the past ten years been researching Budo and now Budo Karate. How has this affected your training? I have personally noticed the change in your training having been a student with you for over forty years, there has certainly been a... curve of improvement not just physically but I believe mentally as well.

Mentally I'm not certain but I certainly do question things more over the years of practising Karate. In my early days in the U.K. regarding technical matters I never felt pressured as I simply followed Suzuki sensei's way. At that time he was at the top, he really had more pressure being the top Wado instructor in this country. It was easy for me to follow. I would practice Suzuki sensei's way of doing Kata and Kihon Gumite and there was no pressure other than to physically train myself.



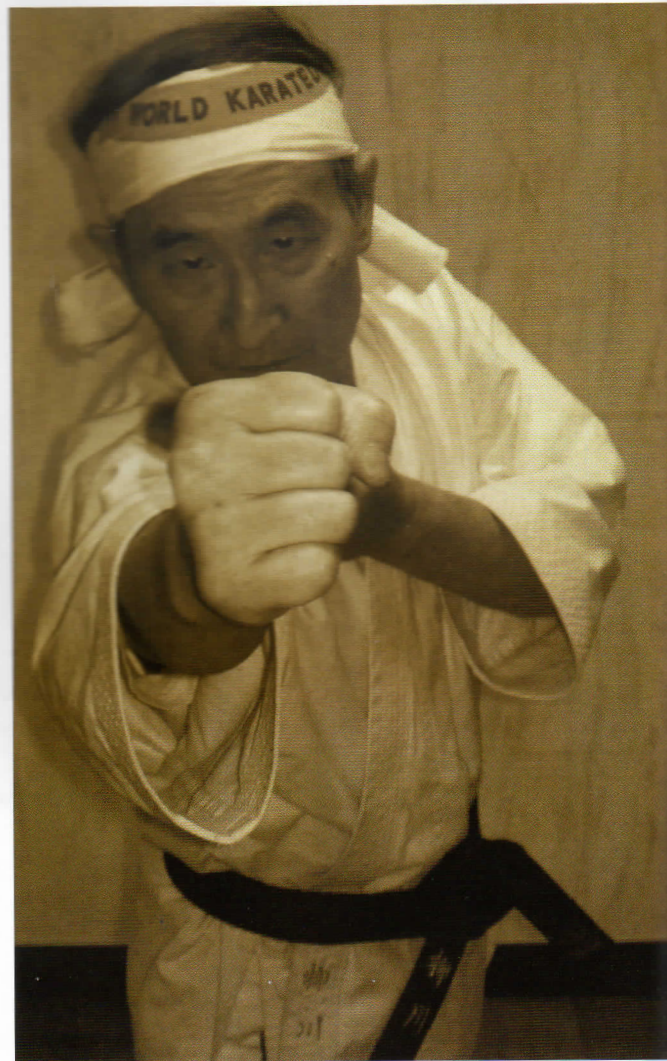
Looking Back – A Different Slant on Things

When the U.K.K.W. fragmented and I started Aiwakai in 1990, that was the time I really started questioning the technical side of Wado. Nobody should stand still. Technically you should never be content with what you are taught. In the beginning there really is no choice, you have to follow a certain way. As the years go by you find things are not so good for this, or yourself, and one of the reasons why I questioned things was, nobody was getting younger, it's a fact everyone gets older. I never even thought this way until I was in my mid forties because I suddenly found I couldn't do Mawashigeri Jodan as easy as before. I remember Suzuki sensei telling me something similar originally he said 'age doesn't matter, just train hard' but he did say in 1995 when I attended his 50th Anniversary Course 'you know Sakagami, I thought age doesn't matter, it does! I have started to feel my age'. I felt I had to change to consider how I trained, not how hard I trained. If you do the same thing day in and day out, exactly as you did it when you were twenty or thirty, you will feel the age. So I thought there can't be much point continuing training if I am going to deteriorate with age getting stiffer in the joints and weaker in the muscles. I didn't mind so much about not being able to easily kick jodan Mawashigeri anymore, but what concerned me was losing the effectiveness of my techniques. I really didn't want to go through fighting with someone and no longer being effective. I thought 'what is the point?' Budo is supposed to be effective even when you are past your physical peak so I really questioned these things.

Looking Back – Yanagawa Sensei's Influence

Then in the early ninety's I read Mr Yanagawa's Budo Karate Book. In fact I met Mr Yanagawa in 1994 at the World Wado Cup in Tokyo. I asked him if he could come over to England to teach and he did say yes... but... some people opposed this in Japan and I felt I couldn't go over my senior's heads. It was a bad position for me to be in and it became a concern how these people would take my invitation to Mr Yanagawa. I had received a lot of support from these people in the past, so to just go over their heads would probably have offend them and I really didn't want to offend anyone, but it seemed the more I read and learnt about Yanagawa sensei the more interested I became. However, just reading his books or watching his DVDs you cannot understand the essence of Budo Karate. You have to be there and actually engage with the technique. One thing I have learned, as long as you train with Yanagawa sensei's concepts of Budo Karate, you do not lose your effectiveness.

In other words your striking and kicking power does not diminish in fact it improves. When this happens it revitalizes your dream, your aims and your goals.



Masahiro Yanagawa

Yanagawa sensei's Budo karate has influenced me greatly. I honestly believe with Wado the foundation is Ohtsuka sensei, but Yanagawa sensei has taken Ohtsuka sensei's concepts to a different level. Ohtsuka sensei never mentioned one strike, one knockout, or anything like that. Although throughout my university days Suzuki sensei always said during our practise of basic techniques 'you don't punch hard enough, with one blow you should be able to knock your opponent out that is real Karate'. That's what Suzuki sensei said and what he insisted on when training.

I believe Yanagawa sensei has come under some criticism from people on internet forums and the like many claiming to have seen his DVD's or have read his book. Firstly you have to be there to see it but most of all to feel it. I tell you, these people talk about good technique and bad technique etc. Many karate techniques that look good are artificial and ineffective.

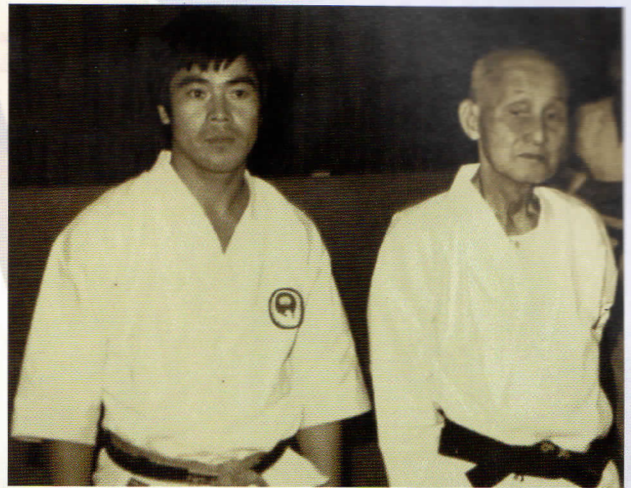
to me it's not real karate if it is critiqued on aesthetics, it is not karate, it is dance. If it is dance or gymnastics and it looks good, then this is good dance or gymnastics but as a martial artist I sometimes wonder, do Karate practitioners when practising Kata think how their Kata works for real fighting? I don't think a lot of students know. I am not talking Bunkai (as this really does not work in a real situation), and I don't mean a street fight or even sparring (it just does not work and some of the competition Kata Bunkai is really what I call 'school boy bunkai' or a 'world of illusion').

I have really found a lot of weaknesses in conventional Kata training because the first thing that most students are taught is to make the Kata 'look good' or 'perfect technique' and then what mainstream Karate call Kime when punching where you stop your fist on supposed contact. Most people will claim that they are punching through the target but try applying the same punch with someone in front of you. It has little effect because you tense your arm to stop the fist. In Kata it can look good or impressive and the same applies in Kumite were Sundome is applied the techniques do not penetrate. Instead of stopping at the point of contact you really should be starting to hit. Even top Japanese instructors, who teach what I call 'J.K.F. style' of kata, it is just is not effective. They seem to be so pre-occupied with shape. Maybe the performance of Sokutoh to joints is ok, but punching to stop or their way of Kime, I am not convinced. So, returning to the point, Yanagawa sensei's Budo Karate, especially his way of Kata, cannot be grasped, understood or evaluated just by watching a DVD or reading his books. Yanagawa sensei actually mentioned a lot of things that he demonstrates on his DVD you cannot see it or recognise it as his technique are more internal then external. The only way to get a grasp on what he is teaching is to visit his Dojo. Maybe those people who criticise should visit him and train, and compare their power, speed and relaxation of his techniques and those of his students with their own. If they go and train and can match their power then fine, they can criticise, but if not maybe they should ask themselves the question 'why not?'

Editors comment: You are so right I remember you gave me some footage of Yanagawa sensei demonstrating and my original feeling was I don't understand this... I just don't get it. I was so used to mainstream Karate. I could see the resemblance to Wado, the connection, but just didn't understand it until we visited his Dojo in 2004. That is when I personally got to taste and feel of the power, speed and technique of Yanagawa's Budo Karate.

Yanagawa sensei's karate is in true Budo sense, it is more superior to anyone I trained with or experienced with other than Ohtsuka sensei (Training wise, he showed and explained to us his technique and to me Ohtsuka sensei was more or less a Budo artist.)

With Yanagawa sensei I feel I have physically and mentally connected with his Budo Karate and I have no doubt on the effectiveness of his technique. This really gives me the incentive to train and I can see and feel the improvements even in my later years.



Last Thoughts...

I would like to say to karate students, just ask and question yourself. Why do you continue to practise Karate? For young students like school children, to be honest they probably don't know why they practise. Parents are the main driving force at this age. They drive them and sometimes push them to train, or maybe some of the young ones have a fascination with karate. But my question is to mainly older students who have been training long enough to know why I ask 'what do you practise Karate for?' I know why and what I practise Karate for, other people don't have to have the same reasons. But I certainly would like to ask certain people what they train for, what their aims are, what their purpose is. These are the questions that I would like to ask many people. Ok, some people may say karate is my living, but what does this mean? I earn my living teaching karate, but that is different from my own training... Why?.. What for?.. Perhaps your competition days are over, your youth is over, what then? Please remember, no one is god, no one is perfect! Some top instructors perform techniques differently to how Ohtsuka sensei performed them. For me this is no problem. However, some instructors do not like to hear people say 'but Ohtsuka sensei did it this way'. They say they change things to improve technique, if these top instructor's disagree (and they do), surely then people who also have many years experience can disagree with them, no one is perfect, no one is the proven "best in the World" it is so easy to forget Ohtsuka Sensei was a unique, a unique Martial Artist.