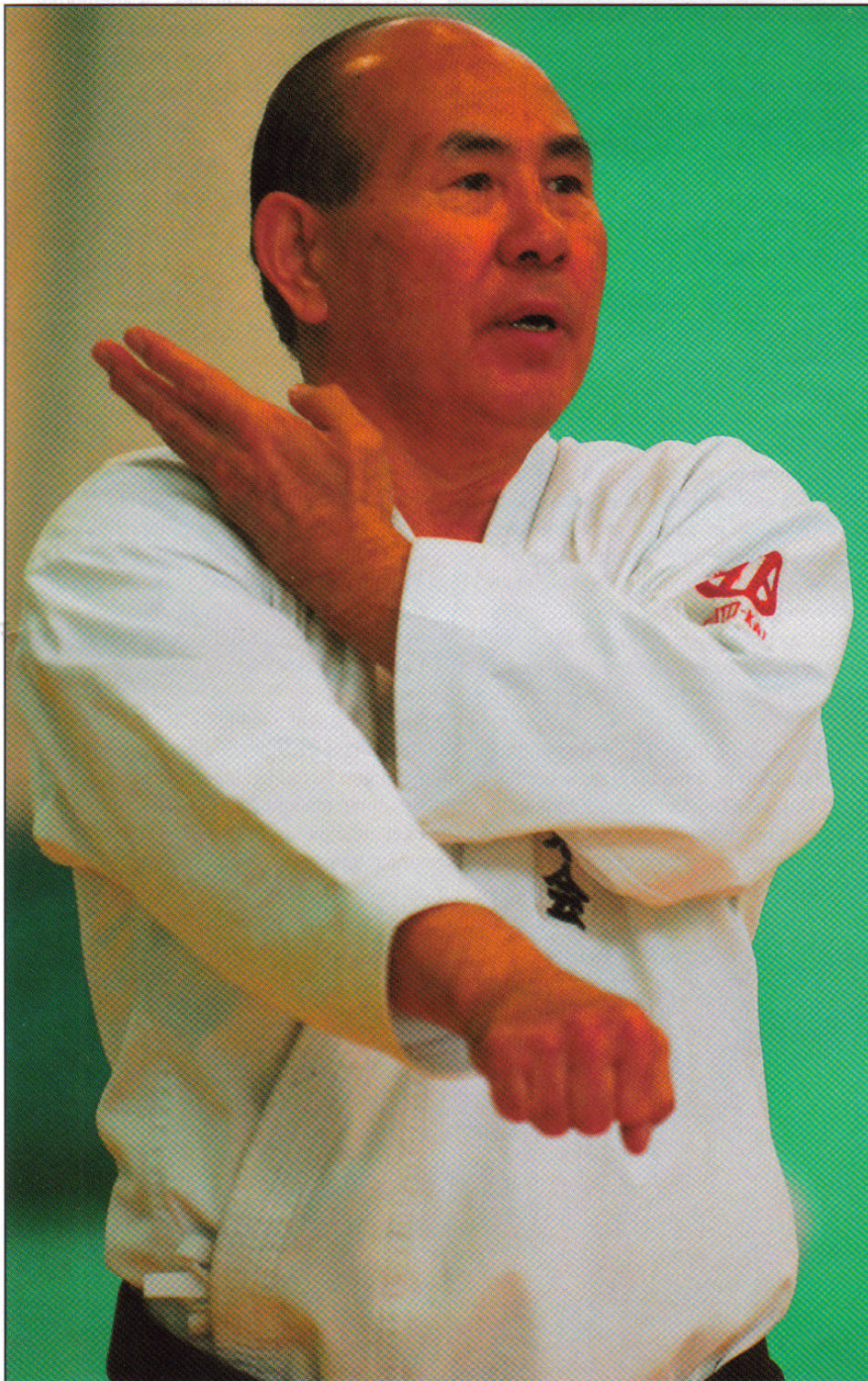


Master Kunio Murayama's UK Spring Course 2007

By Brian Jarvis



This was to be Sensei Murayama's second visit to the UK to meet and teach his British students. His visit followed sensei Moledzki's Iwata Cup Championships in Toronto. Murayama sensei was the guest of honour there and our Shitokai Murayama UK team were also in attendance.

The UK team and I arrived at Heathrow at 08.05, Sensei Murayama arrived at Gatwick at 08.40! Not wishing to keep waiting him any longer than necessary we fought the M25 rush hour traffic, finally arriving to pick him up at 10.15. On greeting him at arrivals I apologised 'gomen nasai', and he replied 'No, gomen nasai for me! I have no baggage, it is still in Newark! I think I should stay here until tomorrow?' Well, having a bus full on very tired competitors and a three hour journey back to the midlands I was not planning on staying another night away from home! Just as well because his baggage did not come in for another two days! It took just a quick phone call to my partner Dona to buy some clothes and toiletries until Sensei's clothes arrived.

The journey back home seemed to drag. We had booked Sensei into a very nice apartment in Montpellier, Cheltenham. It was just 15 minutes from my house and 40 minutes from the course venue in Worcester. The following two days were spent catching up on sleep, a light lunch with Sensei Phil Powell, Murayama Sensei and myself before afternoon training. The training started off with the usual stretching and warm up exercises followed by Sensei's routine of 100 gyaku-zuki then 100 mae-geri. This never failed to bring a light sweat to the brow and we were then set to begin our training. Murayama Sensei is never one to hold back on information and simply asked what we wanted to work on. As our first two requests were for Shuri-te kata, Sensei suggested we concentrate on this group of kata, although over the two days instructor training, we also covered the Aragaki kata's Unshu, Sochin and Niseishi.



The second day followed the same format but this time we worked on the Naha group of kata starting of course with Sanchin and Tensho. Once sensei had reminded us of the fundamentals of Naha style kata we began working on the more advance kata such as Shisochin, Kururunfa, Suparimpei among others. Each kata started with Sensei Phil and I following Sensei' lead then him watching our every move. Each kata was dissected and analysed by a man who clearly has forgotten more than we actually know! Each move we got wrong was corrected and substantiated by showing us the bunkai kumite for that particular technique. A request for a kata he wasn't totally sure of was never met with an excuse, just a simple 'hmm, not sure on that one. I will do my homework and get back to you next time.' No ego, no excuse. That is Murayama Sensei, very straight, very honest.

Sensei Steve Bolland was unable to attend the instructor sessions due to a bug brought back from Canada which insisted on keeping him company in bed for a couple of days. Thankfully he was able to join his students for the weekend course. The first day was for senior grade students only and was attended by 89 students in total. Again, every session

began with kihon after the usual 100 gyaku, 100 mae-geri. Murayama Sensei never asks for anything without offering a reason for doing so, something that many Japanese instructors are criticised for, and probably a result of teaching westerners for nearly forty years from his home in San Pedro, Monterrey, Mexico.

The senior session concentrated on briefly reviewing kata's Jitte, Jiin and Jion. Murayama Sensei explained their origin which allegedly began in the Shoalin temples in northern China before making there way across China and over to the Ryukyu Islands of which Okinawa is the largest. Although this group of kata were developed mainly in the then village of Tomari, today they are accepted as part of the Shuri-te group of kata. A number of students were not yet familiar with some of the kata and Sensei joked that three times through a kata should be enough for anyone to remember the sequence of moves!?

The main kata of focus was Kosokun Sho, one of a group of three kata, the other two being Kosokun Dai and Shiho Kosokun. Once the sequence was grasped by the major-

ity of students Sensei began to explain the various bunkai applications which amused my students no end. It's a rare thing for them to see their Sensei being thrown one way and the other by someone who clearly is light years ahead in his understanding of the art.

Following the senior course was the dan grade exams. The Shodan Ho exam panel consisted of senior instructors Sensei Phil Powell 5th Dan, Sensei Steve Bolland 5th Dan and myself. Taking their step into the Yudansha-kai were Francesca Averill-13, Alex Doyle-13, Jennifer Goddard -16, Alison Lee - 38, Naomi Marshall - 11 and Shelly Richardson - 17. The highest score being awarded to Naomi with 78%.

All grades for Shodan and above are taken by Murayama Sensei. On this occasion there were 18 hopeful candidates, 14 attempting Shodan, 3 attempting Nidan and one for Sandan. There never seems to be enough time at these events and having run over by 45 minutes on the seminar we were rushing to complete the exams which lasted two and half hours. However, all's well that ends well and later that night at our dinner, dance and awards night all successful new dan grade candidates were presented their black belts. Notably the oldest recipient Mr Gary Eble aged 64 was awarded his Nidan to rapturous applause. Murayama commented that Gary was a special man who provide many with inspiration and strengthened his belief that karate-do is for life and not just a youthful fancy or sporting pursuit. Other successful candidates were as follows: SHODAN - Scott Birbeck, Nathan Denton, Jane Dickson, Nicholas Edwards, Sean Fidler, Hazel Harris, Russell Heath, Kieran Hymas, Penny Kent, Yasmin Lee, Daniel Lee, Stacey Poole, Sean Roberts and Daniel Wignall. NIDAN - Steven Dickson, Donalyn Marshall and Gary Ebel. SANDAN - Barry Matthews.

The successful candidates were told by Sensei that their achievement was not a gift from him but an achievement gained through their own efforts and commitment. He also explained the meaning behind the term



'Shodan' as opposed to 'Ichi-dan'. 'Sho' meaning 'beginning' as opposed to 'Ichi' meaning 'one' or 'first'. His message then to the Shodan students being 'now you have completed your basic training now you can start your life long work in perfecting your technique, a process that will never end. Sensei Phil Powell and Steve Bolland also added their thanks and appreciation to Murayama for coming and congratulated the black belts on their successes. The evening passed quickly and although our party of ninety people swamped the Fownes Hotel somewhat, everyone seemed to enjoyed the food, music and presentations.

The following day was an open grade course attended by 137 students including two special guests from the Genbu-Kai Shitoryu association, Sensei Julian Mallalieu and his wife Sensei Sharon Mallalieu, two special friends we have come to know and respect through our meeting with Fumio Demura Sensei in Monterrey at Murayama's annual weekend course and tournament 'Copa Murayama'. After the usual warm up exercises the group were roughly split into three groups. Each group were to be taught a Heian kata by each of the senior instructors. This exercise was part of the Shito-Kai test for the instructors licence 'Jyokyo'. The

sequence of licences starts with 'Jyoshu', assistant instructor, 'Shidoin', instructor, Jyokyo, experienced instructor then 'Jun Shihan' before 'Shihan' meaning master instructor. I am pleased to report that we all three instructors passed our exam and although teaching Heian / Pinan kata is a daily occurrence for all three professional instructors, having an 8th Dan master watch you do it adds a certain something?

Our test now over, Murayama Sensei took charge again to teach his speciality, the Ninjitsu art of Nanban Satoryu Kenpo Jutsu a little known combat system passed on through Fujita Seiko, a 14th generation ninja, to Murayama's own Sensei, the late Manzo Iwata (1924 - 1993). Murayama Sensei is now one of only a hand full of masters still alive with extensive knowledge of this weapon-less system of combat which was used against katana yielding Samurai. Upon killing a Samurai the trade mark left by the Ninja of this particular Ryu was to split the knee cap with the knuckle of the middle finger - ippon ken! Although Murayama Sensei shared a dozen techniques he advised the students not to try to remember all of them but to select a couple of techniques and practice a few and to become really proficient at them. The course as always was over, it seemed

before it had hardly begun. Many parents of students and of course the students themselves commented on Sensei's great ability to communicate many ideas in what is his 3rd language after Spanish and of course Japanese. In my view this is a mark of a true master instructor. At nearly 64 years of age, with jet lag, having left home 10 days ago, visiting Canada and then the UK, he teaches with an infectious enthusiasm and humour that is apparent to all who wish to learn from one of the world's greats. He maintains a humility that I find personally very humbling and is just one more thing that reminds me how lucky we are to have such a man share his experience and time with us.

Later that evening the senior instructors and their wives shared a last dinner with Sensei before saying our farewells. The following day I drove Sensei back to Gatwick and after enjoying a last coffee with him waved him off at departures. Driving home is always a little sad for me. I have three hours to replay the previous few days. I go over kata's in my head, get stuck and realise Sensei is not there for me to ask. It is then I realise the responsibility I have as an instructor myself to treasure the knowledge and maintain it through constant practice less I forget and deny many others the benefit of Murayama sensei's teaching.

