

IAI-JUTSU and IAI-DO

by Roald Knutsen

When I first became interested in Iai more than twenty years ago there were very few Iai-ka even in Japan, possibly only three or four hundred; but now the numbers must run into thousands. In this country I have noted a considerable growth of interest especially in the last two years and because of this I think it is important that certain facts are made clear to would-be students in order that they may avoid mistakes.

Iai-do developed directly out of Iai-jutsu; or Batto, the controlled combative use of the sword directly

from its scabbard. The techniques of the jutsu or batto forms are simple, direct, and devastating. The swordsman is not concerned with the niceties of pure form, or slow movement, or with what to do against a theoretical threat; he uses his sword to pre-empt any possible attack. 'Act first, ask questions afterwards' is the dictum to be followed where batto may be needed. Iai-jutsu, therefore, remains firmly within the disciplines of *ko-budo* (old Budo).

Iai-do represents the later development of Batto in the Tokugawa

Period (1615 to 1858) when the *bushi* (*samurai*) were largely congregated in the castle towns and the military arts were taught in the various clan dojos by authorised masters. In this comparatively stable period and through the increasing influence of non-samurai, many of the old combative meanings were quickly overlaid by attention to such matters as posture, controlled breathing, slow artistic movements, and so on. So much so, in fact, that some of the later developed styles of Iai-do bear little relationship to fighting except that swords are used to go through florid techniques.

This is not to denigrate Iai-do in any way at all. On the contrary, it is most important that the intending student should commence his training in the *do* forms because these styles, and in particular the excellent *Omori-ryu Iai*, teach the basic

requirements and familiarity with the blade in a way that is both thorough and safe. The *jutsu* forms, on the other hand, are on a much higher technical level that requires a high degree of fundamental understanding before they should be attempted. This understanding can only come after years spent at constant practise.

The majority of Iai students continue with their Iai-do for their entire careers because they find in these forms a deeply satisfying mental and spiritual discipline completely divorced from competition. Iai-do at advanced levels is very similar in its objectives to *Kyu-do*, though maybe with a more practical edge. But for those Iai-ka who train within one of the classical *ryu*, or schools, advanced Iai is a rich field for study where one can have the best of both worlds; not only superb-



Fig. 1 Cutting the opponent across the chest in the *Yokogumon* (Flat-clouds) form of the *Hasegawa Eishin-ryu Iai*.



Fig. 2 Completing the same form, as in Fig. 1, with a cut down to the hips. Many Iai techniques terminate with this strong downwards cleave.

ly controlled aesthetic practise but also severe physical training. In advanced levels, Iai, Kenjutsu, and Kendo, come very close together in depth of understanding that they give to *kata* and to the broader areas of *hei-jutsu*, the study of the theory of war. The latter is in no way archaic mediaeval tactics but can be applied to the most up-to-date military thinking. In advanced Iai there is little difference between *jutsu* and *do*, just a shift of emphasis, speed,



Fig. 3 A characteristic thrusting position in the high level *kata* of the *Eishin-ryu*. This is *Monnu* (To go in at a gate) and the thrust is made close to the chest as the swordsman deals with three opponents.

some minor but still important differences in hand grip, *zanshin*, and, most significantly, the attitude of the student towards what he is doing.

An example of the minor changes of emphasis on technique is in the simple act of making a kneeling bow, *rei*, common to all the martial arts and to most of their modern deriva-

tives. In these days the *rei* is made with more or less precision depending on the insistence of the master as a mere ceremonial. The back is bent and the head lowered to near the floor, usually with the eyes looking at the floor immediately to the front or a few feet in advance of the person making the bow. In *ko-ryu*, the classical disciplines, this must never be. It was considered to be very poor manners to expose the back of the neck to the person to whom one bowed, or to the *kami-za*. So in making the bow, the eyes never leave the front. In this way, even in the act of obeisance, the swordsman is always ready for action and cannot be taken unawares. In the *Eishin-ryu* there are three forms that take advantage of inattention during the *rei*—a sure sign of the importance attached to this ceremony.

Since it is said that 'Iai begins and ends with a bow' then awareness, or *zanshin* becomes all important. For this and several other good reasons no one should take up Iai-do studies who cannot go to a dojo where there is a competent Iai master. If there is no local master then just don't attempt Iai but wait patiently for the chance to come along. The early stages of Iai study are the vital ones where the correct manner of carrying and wearing the sword are explained, together with the proper way in which to execute the first few techniques. Once through this period the Iai student can continue on his or her own with occasional criticism and help from visiting Iai-ka. As I have already indicated, Iai requires determination to practise by oneself for many years, almost without rank, and only personal satisfaction at the end. It is a long and hard road to follow.

(Roald Knutsen will be happy to answer any readers questions about Iai or Kendo addressed to this magazine and accompanied by a s.a.e.)