

# KENDŌ forum

by Roald Knutsen

Twice a year the Kendo Renmei holds a weekend camp as part of the all-the-year-round general training programme. These camps are designed to involve dojo groups from many different areas in outdoor practice in direct contrast to the more routine activities in the dojo. These events are under canvas with training on rough hill ground in the South Downs near to Lewes. The most recent, held in the first week in June, was attended by 36 students of all ranks from juniors up to 5th dan.

I don't intend here to merely give a recital of what we did at the camp but rather to show the value of old Budo methods applied to what we may fondly believe to be modern training. I am rather inclined to stress the traditional in Budo and the weaponed arts; well, here at these camps we go right back to the tradition without any transition and it is quite surprising to some people just how realistic training can be when completely out of the artificial environment of the dojo.

It may come as a surprise to some of my readers to learn that any form of Budo practice in a specially designated dojo or training hall only dates back at the most a hundred years. The dojo as a place for military training was the product of the decade or so right at the end of the Tokugawa period and the beginning of the Meiji period (1868). Before that there are records of indoor training but these dojo seem to have been used for other purposes as well. They were often contained within

castle precincts or associated with the buildings within the perimeter of the *buke yakata*, or headquarters which was not necessarily the local castle. If we take the era of recorded practice of *naginata* and swordsmanship, a span of well over 1,000 years, then the "dojo" period is very recent indeed.

It is quite common to see within the various Japanese Shinto shrine complexes small or large areas of ground marked off for sacred use by long grass plaited ropes called *shimenawa*. These ropes indicate that the particular area is under the patronage of a *kami* for some particular purpose. The area is ritually pure. It is thought that the earliest training places for the fore-runners of the martial arts were connected with ritual impurities (shedding blood, for example) and ritual cleansing, especially cleansing with the sword, bow, or spear. It is a well recognised fact that there have been the closest possible relationships from the most ancient times between Shinto and *bu* (in Bu-do). The use of open spaces for training continued throughout the fully documented late-feudal period (roughly between 1490 and 1868) and still continues in several vigorous major *kobudo* traditions.

A large number of *kobudo* masters argue that unless training is taken out of the artificial surroundings of a special building with perfect floors then the students will not be able to understand fully how techniques developed or how the forms will work in more normal everyday conditions. Therefore practice is often in the open air, on mountainsides, in thick undergrowth, on sandy beaches, in woodland, and so on. All with the aim of giving reality to the true object of the exercise. Experience shows that this element of physical realism makes it no more difficult to teach the mental or intellectual meanings of Budo and may even help because movements



Morning Iai-jutsu training in the Saga Kenseikai Dojo, Kyushu. Roald Knutsen was awarded *menkyo-kaiden*, or licence to teach, one of the traditional *Muso Chuko Eishin-ryu*. This dojo is strictly orthodox in Iai and Kendo.

on rough ground makes most students more fully aware of all their bodies. The constant use of perfect dojo floors in kendo, for example, leads many students to "forget" their legs until they may have to face the unusual. Realisation at this late stage is disastrous as anyone who has fought against the *naginata* can vouch!

Outdoor training helps to broaden perspectives. It enables reasonably intelligent people to look at their Budo from an entirely new angle because, for one thing, the nature of the ground prevents any sort of "normal" dojo style being followed. At our Kendo Renmei camps, and we have quite some experience behind us, we have found that we can introduce fresh thinking to such matters as basic postures and unusual follow-up movements from these. In Iai-jutsu in the dojo it is sometimes difficult to give students a true idea of the walking (advanced) forms

because the surroundings are artificial, but outdoors with natural obstacles whole groups of these same students quite easily understand how we deal with such problems as preemptive Iai, with *maai* (interval or space), or with multiple opponents.

I think that too much emphasis on one particular aspect of Budo can lead to error since that emphasis produces imbalance and ultimately distorts proportions. Nowadays, and in kendo terms that means the past hundred years or more, the greatest trend has been towards the use of the *shinai* or bamboo sword. There is now little or no proper use of the *bokuto* or wooden sword, and it was even reported to me at the camp that in some European quarters (British? God forbid!) people would like to see *kata* eliminated from normal training.

Reading, as I always do, David White's often penetrating comments, I must say that I agree with this





Roald Knutsen, 5th Dan, with Ogaki Susumu sensei, 7th Dan *Kyoshi*, at Tagawa in Kyushu, this April.

view that there may be a return to the more spiritual values of Budo. I think I would prefer to say intellectual rather than spiritual because I, too, have been plagued by newcomers who present themselves at the dojo as "hooked" on Zen—they usually last three weeks . . . if that.

Shinai-Kendo is not true kendo as I and many other senior *yudansha* well know. I personally don't think all is well in the kendo world. I think that a very great deal of what passes these days for kendo is abso-

lute rubbish. If David White is correct in his assessment, and make no mistake about it, there are many very senior and influential Budo masters who are working to this end, then we may gradually see the balance redressed. Until that time, in kendo at least, there will be a sharply marked division between those aiming at the traditional values and those who mistakenly think that competition at all cost is all there is. In the meantime our very active programme of traditional Budo will continue unabated—and undeterred.

#### Early Morning Training

D.W. again stimulates my pen—he's as good as a tonic. He comments on Japanese training times and mentions the habit of early morning practice. Getting up and deliberately going to the dojo, at, say, 6 a.m. once now and again is a reasonable experience. How about going every day at that time? Last March and April in Kyushu I had that unreasonable experience every day for over a fortnight. I had volunteered! Some Japanese kendoka are fully committed to this sort of thing and I believe that the present mayor of the city of Osaka, who is a kendo master, trains seven mornings a week before going to his office suite. All very well if you are training in Japan but I thought I would put it on record that pretty regularly over the past six years some of my *Iai* group at my Brighton Butokukan dojo practice at six in the morning three times a week.

#### FINAL DATE FOR COPY

The Publishers ask contributors to kindly note that copy for the JUDO Magazine must be received by them not later than the 10th of the month if intended for inclusion in the following month's issue.