

Leena Wickman
Martin Stelander's reminiscences
on November 28, 1993

MARTIN STELANDER - CORNERSTONE OF SCANDINAVIAN IAIDO

Karl Anders Martin Stelander was born in Uppsala, Sweden, on February 2, 1952. He is a physician by profession, specialized in thoracic medicine, and is at the moment responsible for the health care of the employees of the County of Uppsala. - And, as we all know, he has been the mainstay of the Scandinavian iaido since the early days. The following is an outline of Martin's iaido career as told by himself in the course of the November 1993 iaido camp in Helsinki, where he was the chief judge at the grading ceremony.

The Early Days 1976 - 1984

Martin started aikido practice in 1976 with Ichimura sensei. Before that Martin had not been practicing any kind of budo, though he had always been interested in sports: he had specialized in running 3000 m and jumping.

Ichimura sensei was of the opinion that it was impossible to be good at aikido if one did not study iaido, too. So Martin began his iaido career. At that time iaido was a kind of off-shoot of aikido: there were just special iaido lessons given to aikido people and no grading tests.

When more people became interested, separate iaido training was started, though there still were no grading tests. Martin gradually discovered that iaido was much more interesting to him than aikido.

Finally Ichimura sensei saw that more help was needed if his iaido students were to make progress, and so he invited Kendo Renmei teachers each spring in 1979 - 1984 for a three or four month period to instruct students in Uppsala. One of these instructors was Komaki sensei, "a very hard Japanese": Komaki sensei's first camp started at eight in the morning and lasted the whole day until nightfall with only a half-hour break for lunch. Both sword and bokken training was given. The second day only a few people came back for more training.

First the Uppsala people used to train on tatami, but moved afterwards to a dojo with a wooden floor. This resulted in a lot of numb knees because no padding was used then.

In the 70's there were first some 15 people learning iaido, but soon the

number had shrunk to about 10 students. At that time they were studying Kendo Renmei seitei, and in approx. 1982 Martin received a Kendo Renmei shodan.

Soon after that Ichimura sensei and Komaki sensei had a fall-out, which resulted in different teachers coming to Uppsala each spring. Each teacher taught his own school, among them also Muso Shinden ryu. The Uppsala people found it increasingly difficult to train in so many different styles.

1985 - 1986

With Ichimura sensei's assistance Martin got finally in 1985 a chance to go to Japan for iaido and aikido training, and Nishio sensei, Martin's aikido teacher, arranged him an opportunity to train with Takada sensei, an iaido sensei Nishio sensei was acquainted with. Martin saw right away that this iaido was a thing apart from the iaido he had seen in Europe. He was "quite in a shock". Takada sensei's movements were big and powerful. His tameshigiri was a revelation. "I want to learn this", thought Martin. - It turned out that the shock was mutual (meaning that Takada sensei was shocked at seeing Martin's technique).

At that time Martin lived at an aikido dojo where Nishio sensei taught once a week. It was very nice there: people were extremely kind and in the nights there were long discussions in the kitchen. If you came in from town late in the evening, there was always some food waiting. Also "whisky training" was in the curriculum. Normal lessons were given every morning and afternoon, in addition to which Takada sensei would sometimes come to visit in the evening.

From then on Martin went to Japan practically every spring. Only once did he go in winter - a very interesting experience, because there were holes in the walls of the dojo he was staying at. You had to train very intensively in order not to freeze.

IAIDO

LEIRI 1.-2.11.1986

DOJO: MÄKELÄNREITEEN LUKIO, "MÄKELÄNREITTI" 4

OPETTAJA: MARTIN STELINDER 3. DAN

<u>MÄKELÄNREITTI:</u>	LAUANTAINA	11.00 - 12.30 KÄIKKI 12.30 - 13.30 EGISTYNEEMÄT 15.30 - 16.00 EGISTYNEEMÄT
	SUNNUNTAINA	16.00 - 18.00 KÄIKKI 8.00 - 10.30 KÄIKKI 10.30 - 11.30 EGISTYNEEMÄT 12.30 - 14.30 EGISTYNEEMÄT 16.30 - 18.00 KÄIKKI

MARTIN JETÄÄ LAUANTAINA 9.00 - 10.00
MIDDOKKAINEN SÄLILLÄ 11.00 - 12.00 HARJOITUKSEN
Edellytyksenä on heidän osallistua Mäkelänreitillä

[11] - MÄKELÄNREITTI
MAKSUT: KOKO LEIRI 750,- MÄ, edellytyksenä on heidän osallistua Mäkelänreitillä
PÄSI PRÄIVÄ 80,- MÄ

MÄKELÄNREITTI: DOJOILLA
- MAKUUPUSSI JA
- MAKUULUSTA "JÄRÄN"

ILLANVIETTO: LAUANTAINA PÄIVÄTÖLÄ
HONG KONGISSA VARATTUNA
20 PÄIKKÄÄ

LISÄTIETOJA ANTTA SUKKA -MÄKELÄNEN
PUH. 736702



In 1985 Martin saw Matsuo Kenpu sensei. The sensei was sitting on a chair at a dojo with lots of weapons on the walls, and he was instructing a young boy. Martin found him a very impressive man. Matsuo sensei was at that time very well known in Japan, and used to go to the USA to give lectures.

On that visit Martin was staying with Takada sensei. Takada sensei used to wake up at five in the mornings for iaido training, which Martin watched sitting in seiza. It usually lasted about 45 minutes. After that Martin went through his own morning practice. In the evenings he trained with Takada sensei, sometimes for four or five hours.

The training concentrated on building a sound foundation: you repeated the first technique until you were perfect at it, and only then went on to the second and so forth.

Takada sensei showed Martin also many interesting things about Japan.

Martin was graded nidan in 1985 by Takada sensei, whereupon he was put in charge of most of the iaido training in Uppsala. At about that time he instructed also the first iaido camp in Helsinki. He remembers that he concentrated on cutting and teaching the new basics. The camp curriculum consisted mostly of cutting practice in the kneeling position on the Seitokai tatami.

In May 1986 Takada sensei came to Uppsala for the first time. At that time Martin was graded sandan; Petteri Silenius, Jukka Helminen and Arto Lauerma nidan; Pasi Hellstén shodan.

Taking a grading test with Takada sensei really was something. Martin was the last to take the test so he had time to observe the other people. He remembers wondering why they were so nervous. Finally came his turn. He started to do ipponme, and suddenly discovered that he was not breathing at all. Takada sensei had a way of "pressing" at you, like fighting you from the distance. It was like moving into a wall. You had to show your mettle both mentally and physically in the test.

That was the year (1986) Ichimura sensei left Sweden in the fall, leaving all iaido to Martin.

1987 - 1991

Martin was graded sandan (Zen Nippon Iaido Renmei) at the Kanto Region Spring meeting in 1987. It was a formal Japanese graduation ceremony with seven judges. This was the first time he was present in a Zen Nippon Iaido Renmei Annual meeting, which he found quite impressive. All the top

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*At the iaido camp in Turku January 1987. Teacher Martin Stelander on the middle.
(Photo: S.M.)*

iaido men were performing in a Buddhist shrine, and hundreds of iaido people were swarming all over the place. Martin took the opportunity to do some sightseeing in Kyoto.

Martin was impressed by the strong "Japanese" spirit he observed in the iaido people, so much so that he said to an instructor that perhaps he would have to stop training because of the nationalist spirit. The man said that iaido is for everyone, not just for Japanese. And so Martin continued.

iaido is still symbolized for Martin by one misty early morning. As usual he watched Sensei training, this time outdoors. Normally Sensei practices in a very controlled way, but not that morning. It was living iaido then, with full power and speed. Martin had never seen anything like that. The Sensei appeared a figure out of the 17th century. This was truly a warrior's art. Martin still carries the vivid picture in his mind.

In the evenings they would sit eating and drinking, pick sea shells on the shore, cook dinner.

Martin was graded yondan Zen Nippon Iaido Renmei in 1988.

Takada Sensei changed federation in 1991, and for the first time Martin attended the Dai Nippon Iaido Renmei Annual Meeting. There was a team competition with about 50 teams. This was the first time Sensei's team participated. Martin thinks they placed 5th. There was also a party which Hirai Ajjisai sensei attended. He seemed a kind man.

The Way Martin Sees Iaido

Martin thinks Iaido is very good training for many reasons.

Martin himself started his Budo career with Aikido, which he wanted to learn for self defence. He thinks the best teacher one can find for that kind of Aikido is Nishio Sensei, who still visits Uppsala every year.

Martin became interested in Iaido because of its cultural and technical aspects. Also its historical roots spoke to his personality. Development of spirit came later:

- self-discipline
- true way of seeing things both outside and inside:
the techniques require that you develop a sharp eye,
and you must not lie to yourself.

The Future

Martin thinks he has now come to a point where he either must immerse himself totally in Iaido or find other ways of exploring the spiritual side. He has decided to choose the latter, but he is grateful to Iaido for laying the groundwork.

Earlier he used to take a sword along everywhere and train always when there was an opportunity for it. Today he is very busy as a department head in the health care administration. He still uses what he has learned every day, and goes now on to train in real life, not in the dojo using a sword.

Martin hopes that Scandinavian Iaido will flourish, whatever happens.

