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CHAPTER 2

OKINAWA, THE BIRTHPLACE OF KARATE

Okinawa is the largest island in a group of over one hundred small islands in the southern part of Japan known as the Ryukyu Islands (Lew Chew Archipelago by the Chinese). These islands are located at about 500 km from the island of Kyushu in the southern part of Japan and 115 km from the island of Taiwan. From Mainland China, Korea and the rest of Asia, the distance is an average of about 600 km.

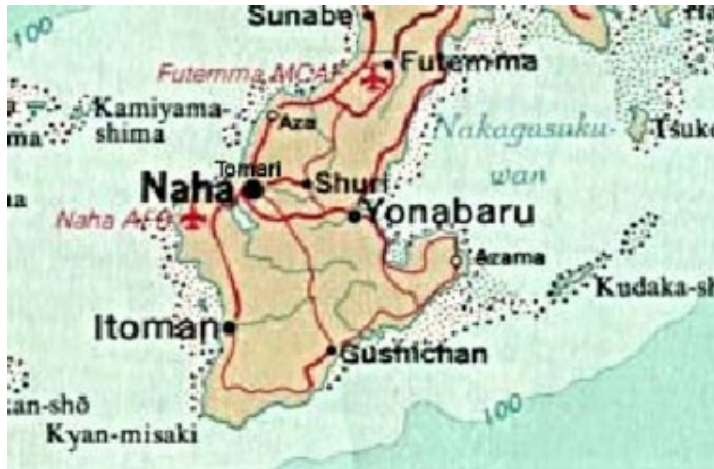
As it is possible to observe, Okinawa is geographically perfectly located between Japan and what was called in olden days 'the rest of the world'. Politically it was the only Japanese port from where products and culture, which originated in foreign countries, could be introduced into Japan. Based on these facts, one could say that Okinawa became a melting pot for many different martial arts whilst at the same time it became the logical place for the development of Karate and its exportation to the rest of the world.

This group of islands remained almost anonymous to the rest of the world until 1945 when the forces of the Empire of the Rising Sun and the Allied Forces battled during the last part of the '*Pacific War*'. This war ended with the defeat of Japan and for Okinawa it was the last time that there was a strategic struggle for the control of the islands. Previous to this occasion there had been efforts by China to annex the Okinawan Islands to its own territory and area of influence.

In 1922 Funakoshi Sensei published his first book '*Ryukyu Kempo Karate*'. In it he made public for the first time, the exact explanations about his Karate's kata and basic techniques. He also added an ample presentation of the nature of Karate and included the first written history about this new martial art. He wrote:

"Let us open up and look at a map of Japan. In the Southern part you will see a long chain of islands, just like a rope. These are the Ryukyu Islands, which we now call Okinawa. Here in Okinawa we have traditionally practiced a Bujutsu that is unique. We are very proud of it. It is not Jujutsu and it is not ken-jutsu. Though it may resemble them in some points, it is in fact unique. People who practice it need no weapons to be able to effectively protect themselves from an enemy. This is what we call Okinawan Karate. When and how did Karate come to Okinawa? There are several stories about this. Some say that about 200 years ago a man called Sakugawa from Akata in Shuri, studied Kempo in China and taught it under the name Karate (Tode) Sakugawa. There is also a reference in the newspaper 'Ohshimo Hikki' written by Tobe of Tosa, about 140 years ago. He told of an eyewitness

After putting an end to civil war and disarming the warlords, Sho Shin made them part of his new government in various governmental offices and at the same time established hereditary stipends for these samurai families. These new officials were the staff that helped the king with the ruling of the Okinawan kingdom and at the same time enjoyed perpetual job security as long as they were loyal to the Sho dynasty. Since the number of families was under one hundred, the king was able to employ two or three members of each family at a time.



The absence of weapons in Okinawa made life peaceful but also made the kingdom vulnerable and easy prey for its neighbours. However, as time went on, the established tradition of no visible weapons gave way to the development of the way of the empty hand and also the Okinawan art of *kobudo* where farming and fishing tools were turned into effective weapons of self-defence.

The almost mythical places like Shuri, Tomari and Naha are the names of the cities that have gone into history as the birthplace of Karate. The size of this whole area is no bigger than any modern international airport.

THE INVASION OF OKINAWA BY THE SATSUMA CLAN

In the year 1609 and with the backing of the new Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa, Lord Shimazu of Japan's southern Satsuma province sent a force of 3,000 soldiers to conquer Okinawa, and this they did with a very bloody and ruthless campaign. The historians claim that the invaders lost 57 soldiers but killed 539 Okinawan soldiers that were very poorly armed and almost without any training for conflicts of such magnitude. Against modern firearms the old rusty swords never had a chance. The Satsuma invaders found a completely unarmed population and it remained so under their rule for the next 250 years. After 1609 Okinawa became a subordinated nation to both China and Japan and the Okinawans were forced to pay taxes to both countries. Thus, for over 250 years the Sho dynasty was a puppet government controlled by Japan. The Shogunate forbade them to follow Japanese customs in order not to alienate China and give cause for war. The Sho kings were not allowed to have an army or wear weapons themselves. The King's only role was to pretend to be the head of state, but in reality he had only the power to collect taxes and enforce the rules of the Shogun. He was made to pay personally for any breach of the rules or regulations.

The 1600's and 1700's were a stable but brutal type of life, but it was the 1800's that were the years that were more propitious to the birth of Karate. The King Sho Ko reigned from 1804 to 1827,

Budo-no-Bugei is what I admire. With this you can let the enemy destroy himself - just wait with a calm heart and the enemy will defeat himself.

People who practice *Budo-no-Bugei* are loyal to their friends, their parents and their country. They will do nothing that is unnatural and contrary to nature. We also have "*the seven virtues of Bu*" They are:

1. Bu prohibits violence.
2. Bu keeps discipline in soldiers.
3. Bu helps keep peace between people.
4. Bu spreads virtue.
5. Bu gives a peaceful heart.
6. Bu keeps control among the population.
7. Bu makes people or a nation prosperous.

Our forefathers handed these seven virtues down to us. Just as *Jussha-no-Gaku* is supreme in the arts, so *Budo-no-Bugei* is supreme in the martial arts. *Mon-Bu* (Art and Martial Arts) have the same common elements. We do not need *Gukushi-no-Bugei* or *Meimoko-no-Bugei* - they are really not necessary. We do need *Budo-no-Bugei* - this is the most important thing.

I leave these words to my wise and beloved deshi Kuwae.

Bucho Matsumura

YASUTSUNE 'ANKOH' ITOSU (1830-1916)

Master Yasutsune (Ankoh) Itosu was born in Yamagawa-muri, Shuri, in 1830. He was born into a family of high-ranking and fine breeding, for that reason he was very well educated and proficient in Chinese and Japanese languages and culture; as he was also a fine calligrapher he was appointed secretary at the Royal Palace.

His education in Karate began in 1846 with Nagahama Chikudon Peichin, until his father took him to visit Sokon Matsumura and requested that his son be taken as a student. Gichin Funakoshi in his book '*Ryukyu Kempo Karate*', explains that it was there that Itosu met Yasutsune Azato who was Matsumura Sensei's *uchi deshi* (principal student).

From the beginning, Itosu never missed a day. There was no rest. Matsumura was very strict with his education; Itosu was tormented, led, punished, scolded and taught. Unconditional submission and obedience was demanded of him. Soon the 16-year old boy grew-up into a 24-year old man. His physique had filled out with strong muscles and he had become the strongest Karate expert in Shuri. He was famous for the superior strength of his arms, legs and hands. Itosu was said to have even walked in the horse stance (from which he received his nickname, Anko). Itosu supposedly was easily able to defeat Azato in arm wrestling. Itosu had very strong hands and could crush a thick stalk of bamboo with his vice-like grip. It is said that he walked past the imperial tombs everyday and would practice his punches against the stone walls that lined the road.

It is quite probable that Itosu studied Karate with most of the other known masters of those days further developing his power, knowledge and skill. One story about his prowess in later life can be observed through the following story: One day a Japanese policeman, in a probable outburst of arrogance and anger, challenged the local karateka in a very impolite way by belittling their martial art. Itosu, who was then responsible for the development of the physical education program of the Okinawan high schools, felt annoyed when he heard about the policeman's comments and much like he had done many years before, decided to do something about it. As this was a troublesome

Master Yabu with his three oldest sons in Meiji 39, or 1906.

The standing youth is 18-year old Kenden. On his left is Kenyu, who later shortened his name to Ken, and on the middle is young Kenshi.



Mitsusuke Harada once said that he had talked to Mr. Tamashiro, an Okinawan who had been a lieutenant in the Japanese army serving in the same regiment as Yabu. He said that in Yabu's time the Okinawans serving in the Army had been a lowly regarded minority. They would often be victimized and beaten. Kentsu Yabu would not stand for this and during one encounter fought back too strongly and killed his opponent. The incident led to an official investigation and Yabu was cleared of all blame and became a hero to his fellow Okinawans. Hiroyasu Tamae told the following story: *'When Yabu was a sergeant he was challenged to fight by another soldier. When the man attacked, Yabu struck him - killing him instantly. There was an enquiry and the investigating officer, who had heard of Okinawa's Karate, asked Yabu if he had used that technique. Yabu replied that he had struck with the open palm, not the fist. If he had used his fist, he explained, the opponent's ribs would have been smashed. He was ordered to give a blow to a nearby tree using his fist. The tree split*

where he had struck it, this action greatly surprised the investigating officer. The outcome of all this was that the cause of death was never made clear in the official report and Yabu's career was unaffected.'

It seems that Mr. Tamae could not have had any personal knowledge of this story since he wasn't then old enough. The most probable point about this story is that it must have been circulating in the Okinawan Karate world for some years and no doubt it grew as the years went by. The reference to Yabu's palm strike is interesting though, because he was supposed to be an expert in open-handed techniques. His favourite kata was 'Gojushiho' which contains a variety of open-hand waza: Shinkin Gima recalled: *"When I was a student in Okinawa my Karate teacher was Master Kentsu Yabu. Master Yabu showed us nukite (finger thrusts) techniques, in which he was an exceptional expert, but he told us : For you it is too difficult and dangerous to do as I do, so in place of nukite you are much better using, closed fist."*

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"Yabu, big and broad shouldered, was regarded by Okinawans as a powerful Karateka and genuine expert. He once defeated Choki Motobu – 'The feared Choki Motobu' " as Shinkin Gima



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increasingly important to organize and unify Okinawan Karate as a cultural treasure to be passed on to future generations. In 1926, Miyagi Sensei established the Karate Research Club in Wakas-Cho. Four instructors, Chojun Miyagi, Hanashiro, Motobu and Mabuni, taught alternately some preliminary exercises and supplemental exercises. Afterwards, Miyagi Sensei gave talks to the students about mankind, daily life, and the samurai code of ethics in order to improve their moral development as well. In 1927, Jigoro Kano Sensei, founder of Judo, saw a demonstration of a kata by Miyagi Sensei and was impressed by the advanced technique and sophistication of Naha-Te. Kano Sensei's influence allowed Miyagi Sensei to perform Okinawan Karate at leading Japanese Budo tournaments sponsored by the government. In 1930, Miyagi Sensei performed at the Butokukai Tournament and then later at the Sainei Budo Tournament in 1932. As its exposure increased, many became interested in Miyagi Sensei's art. One of Miyagi Sensei's senior disciples, Jinan Shinzato Sensei, gave a performance of kata at a Japanese martial arts tournament. After this performance a master asked him the name of his school.

CHAPTER 7

FUNAKOSHI SENSEI, A KIND HUMAN BEING

In one of his columns for *'Karate Illustrated Magazine'* a few years ago, Richard Kim referred to Funakoshi sensei as *'The Master of Masters'*. It could well be that Sensei Richard Kim's reference was not made with regard to just his technical knowledge or the fighting ability that he may have had, but rather the example he gave and set for his students, the contribution that he made to the development of Karate and the moral dimension he tried to give to an art that by nature is partly a system of violent physical combat.

"Gichin Funakoshi was a man of Tao," wrote Sensei Kim. *"He placed no emphasis on competitions, record breaking, or championships. He placed emphasis on the ultimate aim of the individual's self-perfection. He believed in the common decency and respect that one human being owed to another."*

In fact, Funakoshi Sensei was, in the best sense of the word, a gentleman; a type of old fashioned, self-reliant, oriental gentleman that has by now probably vanished from that part of the world.

In his eighties, he still held himself to a strict discipline. He dressed lightly, even in winter and throughout the year slept on a single mat, covered with only one blanket. He always insisted on occupying an upstairs room, so that he could exercise his legs, climbing the stairs.

Genshin Hironishi wrote: *"Funakoshi Sensei would always rise early. After packing away his quilt, he would brush the dust off his portraits of the Emperor Meiji and Takamori Saigo, sweep his room and finally practice some karate kata. Funakoshi Sensei would sometimes take nearly an hour to dress, tidy his hair and make himself presentable. When this was done, he would turn and bow deeply in the direction of the Imperial Palace, and then in the direction of Okinawa. Only when these formalities were completed would he take his morning tea."* All this may sound eccentric and old-fashioned to most of us, but Funakoshi Sensei's ideas on Karate have lasted until present times. He did not believe that Karate was a sport, or a fighting system for winning fights. He believed it was a budo; a martial art for self-training to be used only in a life or death situation or in circumstances where its use is totally unavoidable. Such serious circumstances might occur only once or twice in a lifetime, and so generally you should order your life so as to avoid unnecessary trouble. He advised: *"If such trouble occurs, you should try and walk away from it"*.

It was during his university training that Keinosuke Enoeda received instruction from this great Karate master. He remembers Funakoshi Sensei well and has fond memories of him *"He was in his late 80's and walked in a slow fashion with back bent, but once he put his Karate-gi on, his back*

may have lacked his temperament, ability and particular mind for martial arts. Motobu is in many ways an attractive figure, but judged historically Gichin Funakoshi's style showed the greater potential for development, and in terms of popularity it soon outstripped the Motobu School. It is also believed that Funakoshi had some kind of disagreement with Kanken Toyama (Shudokan) when he began teaching in Tokyo although there are few details of how or why the disagreement took place.

WITH KENWA MABUNI (1889-1952)

However, with the founder of Shito-Ryu, Kenwa Mabuni, it is strongly believed that Funakoshi remained on good terms. In many ways the two men thought alike. Even if there had been any potential for disagreement Mabuni lived some distance away in Osaka and so the two pursued their separate paths.

Kenwa Mabuni was born in 1889 in Shuri, Okinawa and in common with many other masters, was a weak child. He was inspired to become strong by stories of his ancestor Keiyu Oshiro, who had been a famous warrior many generations previously.

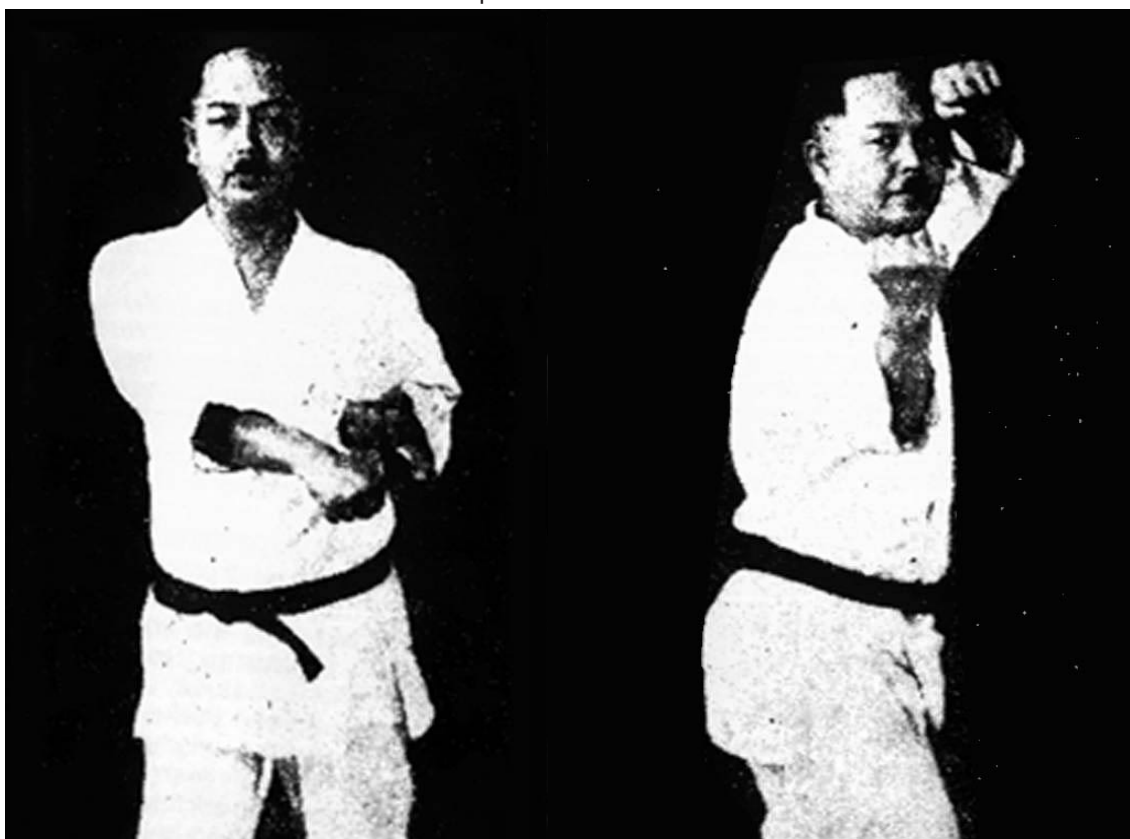
Mabuni began with Shuri-Te Karate training with Ankoh Itosu at the age of 13 and later when he was 20, he was introduced by his famous friend Chojun Miyagi to Naha-Te and Kanryo Higaonna. After he graduated from school and finished his national service, Mabuni joined the Police Force and eventually became a police inspector. The travelling involved in his police work allowed him to continue his study of the martial arts with other experts such as Aragaki and the *kobudo* weapons experts Tawada and Soeishi. Mabuni Sensei often used to say that his Karate training had been useful in his work as a policeman, but unfortunately there aren't any examples of this. No doubt it gave him confidence in carrying out his duties and helped in restraining or arresting suspects.

Kenwa Mabuni's son Kanei wrote, *"In his younger days many people would challenge my father to 'kake-dameshi' (challenge match, or exchange of techniques) after they heard that he was practicing 'karate'. Usually he would accept these challenges and would choose one of the quiet corners of the town for the match. For these encounters each contestant would bring a second to assist him and serve as a judge. There were no special dojos with wooden floors like there are today; we were used to training and fighting on open ground. In those days there was no street lighting so after dark we would get together and fight the challenge matches by the light of lanterns and surrounded by a large crowd. In this dim light the contestants fought, and then after a period the seconds would intervene and stop the fight. After a brief discussion about the merits of the fighters, they would then declare who was the winner and who needed more training.*

Such challenges were often made to my father; and he in turn also frequently acted as a second at other encounters. He pointed out though that people might easily get a wrong impression about karate from these events and for this reason serious karate practitioners lived an exemplary clean life."

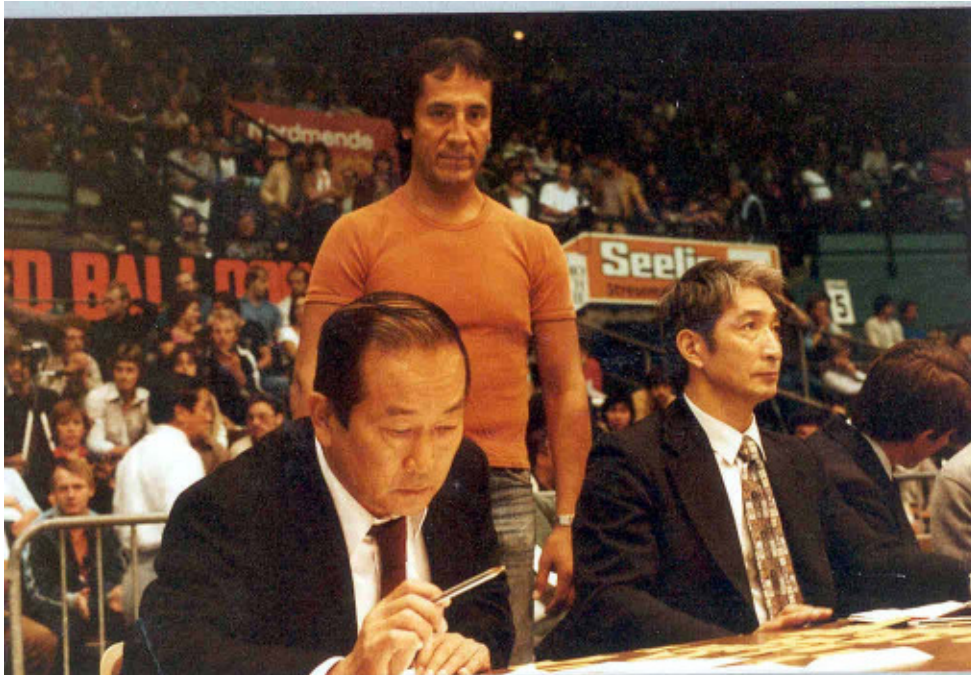
Mabuni taught Karate in his garden and also at the Okinawa Police School and the Okinawa School for Fishing. He was also one of the Karate experts involved with the 'Okinawa Karate Kenkyukai' (Karate Study Group), established in 1918, and the Okinawa Karate Club started a few years later.

In 1928 Mabuni Sensei moved to Japan and settled in Osaka.



The memory of Nakayama Sensei is still firmly imprinted in my mind and what happened then I would like to share it with you: "1965 was the first time I trained with Nakayama Sensei, I was a 6th kyu green belt at the New York Karate Club. Later on in 1968 as a black belt I trained again in the same club. A few years later I went to live in Finland permanently, a couple of years later I travelled to London's Crystal Palace and even later once more to Kempten, West Germany. After that, in 1987 I travelled to train with him at the Crystal Palace, but I, and all others, trained in front of his photograph, he had died. It was a very sombre atmosphere.

Lots of things have been said and written about him, but what impressed me the most was his kindness, exceptional personality, his integrity, his humble character and his profound knowledge of Shotokan Karate-Do. One of the things that really amazed me was how this physically very small gentleman was so respected and admired by so many great Karate sensei, could suddenly change from a friendly man to a demanding disciplinarian instructor in the dojo, like a butterfly turning into an eagle. It was a really amazing transformation. Whenever I trained in one of his camps, I always felt it was a great honour and I really looked forward to these rare opportunities. Every time was special and in his presence I would feel compelled to give nothing but my very best. With some of the JKA instructors that I have trained, most of the trainings were hard and most of us followed, but not out of conviction or enjoyment of the present moment, but mostly because of the punishment or embarrassing remarks that sometimes happened publicly.



With this extraordinary man it was the contrary and often felt really ashamed that I couldn't do any better. I never felt afraid of him but I do believe that he could be

Signing his "Dynamic Karate" book, he never said no, he always was glad to oblige. Something that other masters never did. Here he is signing mine.



Young Sensei Nishiyama and Okazaki directors and the leaders in other styles began bringing free sparring out into the open, experimenting with it, debating it and finally encouraging it. By 1950, virtually all of the major styles of Karate in Japan were practicing some form of free sparring. The problem of developing a set of rules was the biggest obstacle to overcome. Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama was at the centre of the development and years later described the major difficulties faced by the young instructors who were trying to devise a workable formula for free style sparring rules. *“The Japan Karate Association devoted over five years to devise a working set of tournament rules. The delay in the development of Karate contests governed by rules was*

caused by several factors.

- 1) Karate has many techniques that are extraordinarily powerful and effective.*
- 2) If actual contact is permitted, injury is unavoidable.*
- 3) It is impossible to devise protective equipment that could withstand the impact of attacks coming from all angles.*
- 4) Even if it was possible to devise such protective gear, it would not be useful from the standpoint of Karate. Freedom of movement would be severely limited and it would hinder execution of precise techniques, which is a prime requisite of good Karate.*
- 5) Tests have demonstrated that the human neck cannot with stand the impact of a Karate punch or kick to the face, even with a protective mask.”*

Nonetheless, the JKA men were tenacious in their pursuit of what they knew would be the key element in internationalising and promoting this new an exciting martial art through competition.

The JKA contest rules, comprising of 3 chapters and 16 articles, were completed in August of 1956 and all of the collegiate clubs and branch dojos immediately commenced by the staging of tournaments for both the development of contestants skills and for the training of judges.

This tremendous effort and enthusiasm culminated with the staging of the ‘First All Japan Karate-Do Championship Tournament’ held in October 20, 1957 at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, the largest arena of its kind in Japan. It was completely packed with the enthusiastic public and at that point the image and nature of Karate was forever changed. The dream of the humble schoolteacher from Okinawa was about to become a reality, Karate was finally accepted by Japan. Although his original vision of Karate was lost, Funakoshi gave the event his blessing just before he died eight months before the event. In finally allowing Nakayama Sensei and his committee the creation of the

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 1467 Country at War (Songoku Jidai) (Until 1568.)
- 1477 Sho En becomes the first King of Okinawa.
- 1542 Ieyasu Tokugawa is born (d. 1616.)
- 1562 General Kiyomasa, Kato (d.1611.)
- 1583 Razan, Hayashi (d.1657.)
- 1600 Battle of Sekigahara.
- 1603 Begins the Tokugawa Shogunate (Until 1868.)
- 1609 With the backing of the new Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa, Lord Shimazu of Japan's southern Satsuma province sent a force of 3,000 soldiers to conquer Okinawa.
- 1615 Tokugawa Ieyasu laid down thirteen articles called 'The Buke Sho Hatto' (Rules for Martial Families.)
- 1616 The Satsuma Clan takes over in Okinawa until 1868.
- 1622 Yamaga, Soko (d. 1685.)
- 1809 Master Sokon Matsumura is born in Okinawa (d. 1890.)
- 1828 Master Yasutsune Ankoh Azato is born in Okinawa (d.1906.)
- 1830 Master Yasutsune Ankoh Itosu is born in Okinawa (d.1916.)
- 1846 Master Itosu begins his karate training with Master Matsumura.
- 1853 Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry arrives to Okinawa.
- 1863 Master Kentsu Yabu is born in Okinawa (d.1937.)
- 1868 Master Gichin Funakoshi is born in Shuri, Okinawa on November 10th.
- 1868 Begins the Meiji Restoration Era.
- 1869 Master Chomo Hanashiro is born in Okinawa (d.1945.)
- 1870 Master Chotoku Kyan is born in Okinawa (d.1945.)
- 1871 Okinawan islands part of the sovereignty of Japan.



I was originally born in Perú, South America, but now the lovely city of Tampere has become my home, here I reside with my family, from whom I have always received a very supporting feeling in respect to my work.

I began my career in Shotokan karate in 1964 at the New York Karate Club in New York City. At the present time I hold the rank of Shichi Dan -7th degree- in the style of Shotokan. I am, because of my work, a well known international instructor and a former referee with the J.K.A. World Karate Federation, J.K.A. Shotokan Karate-Do International and the Finnish Karate Federation. As I mentioned in my first book: I have trained with the best that ever was, beginning from Senseis like M. Nakayama, H. Nishiyama, T. Okazaki, M. Mori, T. Kase, T. Mikami, M. Ueki, H. Kanazawa, K. Enoda and others from the Shotokan school. Also I have participated in training camps with Senseis Hironori Ohtsuka, Gogen Yamaguchi and Mas Oyama.

To put this book together I spent about ten years of continuous work traveling through the internet in a daily bases searching for the most accurate information available from other authors before me. This book contains over 200 hundred pictures in color and black and white, that in most cases I had to repair with photo programs, and covers the history of Shotokan karate from its beginning in Okinawa until the end of the Masatoshi Nakayama era in 1987. In its pages it will be possible to find a description and photographs of the karate masters that have had the most influence in the developing of this martial art.

In it is also included a description of Okinawa's geographical position as the birthplace of karate and as the bridge between the Asian martial arts and Japan.

Finally, without being modest, this is a brilliant opportunity to know the past history of karate which will be helpful in order to understand its meaning and its future.