

GASSHUKU DIARIES

Special Interests:

☉ *Tensho* - mindful breathing in *kata* explained by Sensei George.

☉ 'Air' and 'Earth' techniques – underlying principles of *Goju-Ryu* taught by Sensei Linda

☉ E.T.G. – eyes, throat, groin – precision target areas in Sensei Simon's class

☉ *Oyo bunkai* – think 'out of the box' when practicing *bunkai kata* by Sensei Andy

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SHEFFIELD GASSHUKU, MARCH 21-22, 2009

ORGANISING THE GASSHUKU

If you thought that a *Gasshuku* (training camp) is only about training then you are half-right. That is, I think, partly because for the *Gasshuku* organisers it's a different ball game. Behind the scenes there is plenty of work and preparation. For example, with this occasion Sensei Linda and Maroulla, O.T.G.K.A.¹ Treasurer, went up to Sheffield on Friday to check the venue and make sure all was in order. Maroulla's efforts to find us

reasonably priced accommodation, cheap travelling fares, emailing back and forth with venue details and directions, turning up early Saturday morning to register the odd sixty participants have proved to be worth while. The *Gasshuku* started promptly and carried on smoothly. Sensei George, O.T.G.K.A. Chief Instructor and Sensei Andy, the 'local host' of the association, acknowledged all her efforts in front of

everyone present in the training hall.

There is another part to it. That is about meeting other *karate-ka* (karate practitioner) and having fun. As some would have it, you really join a club when you start meeting the people you train with in the *dojo* (place of the way) outside its borders and have fun. This leads onto the next paragraph on how we spent the night before *Gasshuku*.

THE NIGHT BEFORE GASSHUKU

Once upon a time... a week ago from the date I am writing this article, a few members of Tooting Karate Club headed north to meet up and train together at the spring training camp, in Sheffield. Some of us met on the Friday before training. We stayed in a newly found 'Gasshuku Aston Hotel' as Sensei Linda referred to it since. The above 'name' was given as it appeared we were the only guests in this brand new hotel, which I suppose it gave us all a sense of being in a hotel solely open to *karate* practitioners during a training camp with their wet

karategi (training costume) hanging in the balcony.

On the Friday night, however, we gathered around the bar and in the spirit of the *Gasshuku* we were having fun, listening to some inspiring stories and having a good old drink.

By midnight, the *Gasshuku* spirit and ... other spirits enwrapped us all. Only with sorrow we had to go to bed and catch a few hours sleep of what was left of the night.

On the other hand, there was the looking forward to the next day training kind of

feeling. The enthusiasm of what was about to come was greater than the 'having to go to bed' kind of feeling.

In the next pages, I wish to share some thoughts and impressions that have stayed with me. I wrote them with all of you in mind, and especially with those who could not be with us at the training camp.

However, those who wish to read at a glance Sensei Andy's descriptive review please visit: www.otgka.co.uk/sheffield0309.htm.

¹ Okinawan Traditional Goju-Ryu Karate Association

DAY I

On Saturday morning we were shuffled into groups as follows: *Sandan* (3rd Dan) and above with Sensei Linda, *Shodan* (1Dan) and *Nidan* (2nd Dan) with Sensei George, *Kukyu* (9th kyu) to *Yonkyu* (4th kyu) with Sensei Andy, and *Sankyu* (3rd kyu) to *Ikkyu* (1st kyu) with Sensei Simon. After lunch we were re-shuffled and were taught in rotation.

Sensei George's warm-up prepared us for the Katas we were about to practice and/or learn, *Shisochin* and *Sanseru* (or 36 hands). Sensei emphasised the importance of practicing *kata* to the extent where it becomes a

second nature to the *karate-ka*. His patience in teaching us the intricacies of these two Katas was much appreciated.

Sensei Andy explained the role and the meaning *kakie* (pushing hands) exercises have in conjunction with *bunkai kata*. For that purpose he encouraged us to apply the techniques in a free manner of thinking. In other words, to think 'out of the box' and instead of doing the same techniques he encouraged us repeatedly to research new ways. It felt like we turned into experimenting scientists. He believes that in this way *karate-ka* is more

likely to find his/her own techniques that work best in a self-defence situation. We experimented this approach on 1:1 basis with a partner.

Sensei Simon taught us about the relationship between the attack and defense mind in *kumite* (sparring). One distinct stage in competition *kumite* is *kaishi-ippou kumite* (reaction, one-step sparring). He explained about this kind of attack as being both a committed attack and keeping a defensive mind, hence the action/reaction awareness in the mind of the *karate-ka*.

Sensei Linda took the last class for the *Sho* and *Nidan*, on Saturday. In her characteristic style she demonstrated first how to execute *taisabaki* movements of the body sideways, backwards and forwards from *kamae* (guard) position. These movements are seen or referred to as the 'gentle' movements in *Goju-Ryu* and are employed when the defender wants to deviate an attack making use

of the footwork to step aside and keep a ready mind to employ a counter attack.

We repeatedly, went up and down the training hall practising in twos and threes responding with *taisabaki* to slow and simple attack and gradually increasing to fast and unexpected attacks of the partners we were training with. The impression was that Sensei Linda had her watchful eyes laid upon us

all, at once. In reality, she was going from one mini-group to another correcting where needed or further explaining the importance of *ma-ai* or distance-time relationship in doing *taisabaki*, which allows the two opponents facing to evaluate each other's movements and intentions in rapport to their own situation, space and time. This is how the first training day finished.

Sensei Linda starts her class with taisabaki (body turning movements) – a more 'air' like or 'gentle' technique of Goju-Ryu.

GASSHUKU SPIRIT

The training on day one finished, but that doesn't mean the day was over. As soon as the training finished we changed and off we went to see Sensei Andy's new full-time *dojo*. His new *dojo* opened its doors that week on Monday. It still smelled of fresh paint when we got there. At the entrance it has

a dedicated area for shoes, and upstairs where the *dojo* is *kanji* (Chinese characters) were hanging on the walls, and a photo of Miyagi Chojun was fitted on the *shomen* (front) side of the *dojo*. After visiting the *dojo* some went for a drink and others for a nap. ☺

In the evening, the spirit of the *Gasshuku* was spread among the twenty odd people who gathered at the new '*Gasshuku hotel*' to enjoy the stylish and tasty food, and drinks afterwards. It was a pleasant atmosphere and an enjoyable opportunity to meet and be with the people present there.

DAY II

Sunday training was about to become even more interesting than we could hope for. *Sho* and *Nidan* started the day learning *Tensho kata* with Sensei George.

Once again, he demonstrated great patience and in a methodical manner Sensei George took us through each step of *Tensho kata*. In my humble view, it is a very difficult *kata* to master and as he explained to us it requires of us to be mindful of each technique within it, and especially mindfulness of breathing. He said, 'we are all masters at breathing without thinking'.

Besides, breathing is very important in *karate* and essential in one staying alive. Curiously, if anyone thought that breathing is boring just hold your nostrils whilst you have your mouth shut and you will see how interesting

E.T.G. – eyes, throat and groin – this is the mnemonic Sensei Simon taught us. In his charismatic, nevertheless serious style, he confided to us that out of the visible points in the human body these were the most vulnerable, which in his view, give the maximum results when struck.

Following the lessons we were given on Saturday training, namely on *kaishi-ippou kumite*, in this session with Sensei Simon we had to include in the semi-free *kumite* strikes to the above mentioned areas and takedown the partner. As some of us have experienced the strikes to the throat,

breathing turns to be! Equally to breathing, perseverance in practicing *kata* day in, day out brings it near perfection and takes us to the level of mastery.

Sensei George also, explained the difference in the breathing when practicing *Tensho* and *Sanchin*. From what I recall, in *Tensho* the breathing is softer and slow whilst in *Sanchin* the breathing is hard and when breathing out the air is expelled in a more explosive manner. Doing *Tensho* and *Sanchin* was a very good way to focus us from the start and for the rest of the training.

Next, was Sensei Linda's class. In her balanced way, she continued yesterdays' training on 'air' like *taisabaki* techniques and complemented it with 'earth' like techniques. If yesterday we had to be supple in

although applied with control were quite painful and left us with a chocking feeling.

Somewhat similar to Sensei Andy's urging us to explore and think 'out of the box', Simon Sensei urged us to practice in a different way than the one we usually practice in the *dojo*, and look for new ideas and meanings taking in account our own particularities and situations we are in at one time or another.

Continuing from that, Sensei Andy's session was another example of that with reference to *kata Saifa*. I refer here to his refreshing session on the *renzoku*

avoiding an attack, today we had to defend strong and entwine that with a strong attack, at first. Consequently, it was not just about defending and reacting with a strong attack. It was about bringing together the 'air' and 'earth' techniques. So, we had to measure distance when moving sideways or backwards so that we were able to come toward the opponent or rather fit in close with the countering attack. In my humble view, this kind of weaving of both 'air' and 'earth' techniques is an embodiment of words in action. The following words come from Paulo Coelho's *Manual of the Warrior of the Light*: "make a lesson of self-defence from each and every opponent's attack." Many a time, I pondered over what he meant by that. To see Sensei Linda demonstrating just that was like one of those few 'A-ha' moments.

bunkai kata of *Saifa*, which he covered for the *Sho* and *Nidan*, on Sunday.

We were to practice first on our own and then with a partner applications of *Saifa*. The applications were first demonstrated in a standardized form and later in their alternative *renzoku bunkai* form, which we had to practice with a partner.

This is how the training ended, and because there is a time to come and a time to go as soon as the *Gasshuku* came to a close we were on our way home... And live happily since.

In the same vein, Sensei Linda continued the next day with the 'earth', 'Go' or hard techniques.

In her balanced way she demonstrated the principles of Goju-Ryu by compiling 'air' and 'earth' techniques.

WRAP-UP

It is possible that if another person were to write this article you would have had probably a completely different version of the Sheffield *Gasshuku*. Having admitted that, I would like to conclude that what I put together is a version of my own impressions from the driver's seat rather than from the passenger's seat or from within rather than from without.

These impressions have stayed with me like the printed colours on a stamp. The colours of Sheffield *Gasshuku* express the

constellation and variety of traditional *Goju-Ryu* painted by each Sensei in their own styles. Whichever the style, we saw it painted in a variation of *oyo bunkai kata* to encourage a *karate-ka* to think 'out of the box' or in *kaisho-ippon kumite* or as a union of the 'air' and 'earth' techniques, based on the underlying principle of balance between *hard* and *soft* in *Goju-Ryu*. This alchemical amalgamation of the main components of *Goju-Ryu* has been thought through and taught in a traditional manner by the

very experienced teachers of the O.T.G.K.A. I was delighted to be at the receiving end of their teaching and feel indebted to them all. Sensei George, Sensei Linda, Sensei Andy and Sensei Simon THANK YOU very much and I hope for more *Gasshukus* like this in the future.

ONEGAISHIMAS!

Yours in Budo,

Iulius-Cezar Macarie
Tooting Karate Club

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please note that other events are coming up soon. Here are some dates for your diary:

🕒 Sensei Linda Marchant teaching on the 3rd-5th April in Halle, Germany

🕒 Miyagi Chojun Festival - April 30th-3rd May, Canada

🕒 South Area O.T.G.K.A. Course - October TBC, Winchester