

# Samurai News from Honbu



## Kaiso's Travels



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## Sensei's ~~Corner~~ Article

*Travels in Switzerland and Poland, Birmingham and New York*

By Toshishiro Obata

In October, I went to Switzerland and Poland. My wife assisted me in Switzerland; it was her first time to Europe. The seminar participants numbered approximately 50 students. The training space was very wide compared to the previous times, which allowed for more movement. On the wall, there were many flags of the world: Japan, America, Switzerland, Germany, and France...with the Shinkendo Nobori in the middle. This was a very nice setup, and I would like to see it more often at other seminars. Before the seminar, Sensei Josef took me, my wife, Brent, and Josef's wife to the

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mountains (top of Europe). We also visited a German ruin near a small town, enveloped in vine yards – very nice! This is the 46<sup>th</sup> castle I went to. Later, we went to a castle (#47 for me) in Switzerland on top a big stone hill. This castle is still intact after many years, and the inside was renovated into a museum. During the one week we were there, we went to Germany 3 times: once for sightseeing, and twice for dinner. Personally for me, it is very fun to continually cross the German border and travel.

I believe the seminar went very well. We had a lot of German and Swiss participants, and had a high level training. I can see a steady growth in the quality of the students and their techniques over the years. Next year in Germany, we will be having a seminar in the same season. I hope all the students will interact well and have a good training like we did in Switzerland.

My wife returned to Los Angeles on Monday. On Tuesday, I went to Poland, traveling through Italy. This was my first trip to Poland, and I was awaited by the seven eager instructors there.

First we did some sightseeing. We visited a mountain range, and traveled up by a cable car. The next day we went to a castle in Krakow, the 48<sup>th</sup> castle that I have seen so far. Krakow is a very big and beautiful city, with a very rich history. I saw an 8 meter large, 13 ton heavy bell in the tower of a church, and I very much felt like I was in Europe.



**Polish and Ukrainian Instructors**



**Social Care House for Pure Children**

The seminar had about 80 participants, including 10 children. The training space was very wide and nice, but very cold compared to Los Angeles. I believe the seminar went very well. The seminar only lasted three days, but I covered many basics. Most of the students have a foundation in Aikido, so they were able to pick up Shinkendo techniques very quickly. Sensei Gregory's wife Monica had a very loud, clear, and powerful voice, so she led class many times. I believe that learning to teach is also very important. On Sunday, the mayor came by and watched our demonstration. We showed everything we practiced during the seminar, so it was very nice. If the Polish students spoke English, it would be much easier. Next year, I hope to go again. There were also some students from Ukraine there who were interested in hosting a seminar in Ukraine in the future.

After two weeks of resting, we had a student from Singapore, Jeffery Tie, visit the Honbu and train with us.

The next day, I went to Birmingham for the seminar there. I have been going to Birmingham since the 1990's. This time, there were 19 participants. On Sunday, we went to Atlanta for another seminar there with 28 participants. I am very grateful that the students come to my seminars consistently. I would like to remind students that the AL/GA branch puts up their monthly online newsletters as well, please take a look at them at: <http://isf-alga.com/>.

On Monday I went to New York with my wife assisting me this time. The day time was scheduled for instructors, and the morning was scheduled for the regular students. I went over Bo and Sai with Lou Sensei.

Lou Sensei took us sightseeing, and my wife saw Manhattan for the first time. We also saw Times Square and visited "ground zero" – my wife found the landmarks fascinating.

This weekend (November 16-18), Sensei David Fazio and Sensei Travis Crane came from Illinois and trained at the Honbu, both private and regular class.

My seminars this year are over, so it's time to get well rested. I hope to see you all at Keiko Hajime 2007!





**At the Swiss Castle Gates**



**The ISF is Grateful to Sponsor Mitsubishi Motors!**

# Shinkendo seminar in Poland

By Gregory Samonczuk

On 14th October in dojo MOSIR Zabrze began a grand seminar of Shinkendo in Poland. Over one hundred people from five countries: Hungary, Netherlands, Ukraine, Poland and, of course Japan (Obata Kaiso), have united together to practice Shinkendo, holding bokken in sweaty hands, giving war cries "Ei Ya To" while running, swinging and cutting for more than 3 hours per day.



Obata Kaiso has honored us with his presence, along with Brent Hire Sensei and Roland Lajos Sensei to make our lessons more effective. Also Alexander Kozlowsky (3 dan Yoshinkan Aikido), Vadim Chernykh(2dan Yoshinkan Aikido) and Volodymyr Vashchyshyn(2dan Yoshinkan Aikido) came from Lviv to Poland to see and be with Toshihiro Obata Kaiso. It is with thanks to official sponsors Mitsubishi, Generali Group & Henkel, and organizers Grzegorz with Monika Krzywicky, and Rafał with Sylwia Wilk that this two-day seminar was possible. But it didn't stop on simple training. The first graduates and teaching licenses have been given directly from Obata Sensei hands.

The seminar ended with a big Shinkendo demonstration, where all students performed what they have learned to audiences. All income from selling tickets on this demonstration has been given to social care house for pure children in Zabrze. Also Obata Kaiso has showed his big generosity by giving great donation. This was not the first, but definitely was the biggest step to spread Shinkendo to Poland and Ukraine. We are all looking for next Obata Kaiso visit in Poland.

Now we need to grab bokken and practice to be ready for it. OSU!!!

# History of ISF-AL/GA Participation in Japan Fest

By Paul Couch and Yumiko Matsuoka



This year was the tenth appearance of Shinkendo at Japan Fest. We first participated in this event in 1996. It was the year when Japan Fest was moved from Atlanta Botanical Garden to Stone Mountain State Park since it was growing so fast. Now, this two-day event draws 17,000 to 20,000 people from around the South.

The history of participation in Japan Fest is parallel to the Shinkendo growth in Atlanta. We first started Shinkendo in 1994 at Sports Life Club in Marietta as well as at the Atlanta Enrichment Learning Center in Little Five Point South. Mary Gile Sensei, now a Branch Chief of Kikentai Dojo, is the only remaining original student of Sports Life and Sensei Antonio Cobb in ISF-AL/GA was among the first members of Little Five Point Dojo. We moved to YWCA, Marietta in late 1994 and then to Atlanta Budokan Dojo in Marietta in 1996. Kalila King Sensei and Lionel Jones Sensei started their Shinkendo training at YWCA dojo. At the same time, our Little Five Point Dojo was moved to Decatur Recreation Center, Decatur. Atlanta Budokan later became independent shibu under Mel Williams Sensei and separated from ISF-AL/GA in 1998.





Up to 1995, Japanese festival consisted of small events which were scattered throughout Atlanta during fall. Sports (mainly martial arts) and dancing groups performed at Mercer University on small scale. In 1995, the Japan Day event was organized at Atlanta Botanical Garden. This was the first time that many different activities were brought in to a central and visible location. Exhibition by cultural groups based in Atlanta and other

cities in the South, deligate from sister city Fukuoka and sister prefecture Kagoshima had a wonderful and impressive display and performance. We observed this event and decided that this is the type of activity we should participate and support as a practitioner of traditional Japanese martial arts. We immediately contacted the official at Japanese Consulate which was then handling the event.

We took our responsibility to introduce Shinkendo to Atlanta public very seriously. There was no other group representing Japanese sword arts except for Kendo group at that time. We wanted to exhibit our art to the Atlanta public correctly. We have been giving a demonstration at Tuscaloosa in Alabama since 1994. Obata Kaiso also participated in the demonstration at Tuscaloosa in 1994 and 1995. The demonstration with Obata Kaiso helped us tremendously to plan and formulate the ones for Japan Fest.

One year in the past, we performed with only 5 students. This year, over 20 students from three Dojo, Birmingham, Huntsville and Atlanta, participated. The stage has improved tremendously. The first performance was on a metal stage without any covering, which was actually an 18-wheeler trailer. We were almost dancing on the hot stage facing direct sun. Other years, we had to perform on a concrete floor or wavy wooden stage. This year, the stage was situated on a concrete opening surrounded by trees, was stable, carpeted and was a good size. We have been having extremely good luck with weather. Only 2 occasions in the past 10 years, we were rained out and the demonstration was moved into the building. Since 2000, we added Samurai weapon display booth to introduce Samurai culture otherwise not readily available to the general public. It has been a very popular exhibit ever since. In 2004, we were asked by Consulate General of Japan to assist in the exhibit for "150 years anniversary of Commodore Perry's visit to Japan" held at Japan Fest. We sent two students, Michael Philpott Sensei and Richard Akers disguised as Samurai to attend the exhibition.

Every year, the Japan Fest gave us many memorable moments. We are proud to be a part of Japan Fest and support such events to promote Japanese culture. We believe that we are obligated to pay our appreciation back to Japanese culture itself by supporting events like Japan Fest.



# A Holiday in the USA & a Pilgrimage to the Honbu

By Jeffery Tie – Kaza Yama Dojo, Singapore

In October 2005, my wife and I had an opportunity to cruise on the good ship *Carnival Conquest* sailing to the Caribbean Islands. My journey started with a long flight from Singapore, transiting at Narita before landing in Los Angeles. We immediately connected with an AmWest flight to our final destination, Houston. It was a long and tiring journey traveling cattle class! The *Carnival Conquest* normally operates out of New Orleans, but due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, now uses Galveston as its port-of-embarkation.

It was a relaxed week filled with great food, wonderful company and excellent entertainment. The roulette table in the casino was the American version with both a zero, and a double zero, very different from the European version that I am more familiar with. I also made it a point to practice Shinkendo on board the ship. The ball courts on the top deck were not used at 6.00 am, making it a great open-air dojo. However, without a proper bokuto, I had to improvise and borrowed a (broom)stick from the ship's crew.

For me, the highlight of the cruise was the port call at Grand Cayman Island.

This island is surrounded by very shallow water, ranging from depths of 5 feet to 15 feet. The shallow water extends by approximately 4 miles around the island, and then sharply drops to deep-water depths. The local fishermen just needed to sail short distances to catch deep-water fish, and they normally gutted and cleaned their catch once they reached the calm shallow waters around the island. They threw away their unwanted catch, feeding stingrays in the process. These stingrays eventually became semi-domesticated and the fishermen started playing and swimming with them. Thus, a whole new tourist attraction was created.



We took the shore tour to “Stingray City” where we swam with stingrays. It was an amazing experience.

The next stage of our USA holiday was the 2-day stay in Los Angeles; my specific intention was to visit and train at the Honbu Dojo. Saito Sensei very kindly assisted me by recommending a Hotel in Chinatown, five minutes away from the Honbu.

Our adventure in LA started when I decided to walk to the Dojo. From experience, I know that I would see much more on foot than from a taxi or car. I assumed that a 5-minute car journey should not take longer than a 30-minute walk.

We started at 5.00 pm from the Chinatown hotel; I managed to make 3 wrong turns and it was dark by 5.30 pm. Kerry, my wife, was beginning to panic in a strange environment. Eventually, we reached the correct building none the worse for the experience!



Training at the Honbu was an intense and eye-opening experience. "In the land of the blind, One Eye is king". In Singapore, where Shinkendo is still very new, I am like the One Eye king. But in LA, when practicing with James Sensei, Matthew Sensei and Saito Sensei who are highly skilled, I realize that I still have a very long road to travel in my study of Shinkendo.

I also had the benefit of a private lesson with Obata Sensei. The lesson was not only filled with techniques; more importantly, Obata Sensei's knowledge, enthusiasm and charisma made the two-day training session a revelation.

Obata Sensei and Mrs. Obata and Saito Sensei very graciously hosted us at a wonderful Japanese dinner after class.

Back in Singapore, I have told the other students here about the Honbu Dojo, and my short time in LA. I hope to inspire them to also visit the Honbu. To this end, one of the Singapore dojo's short-term goal is to attend Keiko Hajime in January 2007. If all goes well, we'll be in LA soon.



# At Last! After 10 years in Canada!

By Bruno St-Pierre – Rimouski Dojo, Canada



We finally had Obata Kaiso over here in Rimouski. Through the hurdles of life, work and family obligations, I felt that the conditions were favorable and Rimouski dojo was doing good enough to be worth while having Kaiso over.

Despite that Rimouski is not that far (as opposed to Europe for example), but since it is a small city, there is no direct flight from LAX, Kaiso made the experience of regional jets and their milk run. Making a time of travel similar to overseas but with many stops, he thought that the trip was terrible, but we sure made it up with our hospitality and a few domestic dark beers.

Upon his arrival, we had the chance to visit the gallery of an artist that make framed glass montages using fish bones, of which we had a special order made for Kaiso. He





was impressed of how nice pictures the lady could make using something as simple as cod head bones.

The seminar went very well especially considering that it was my first time organizing one with the little oblivions that came along.

Since it was the beginning of the season with rusty

students and new comers, a good part of the training was on basics.

Like in many seminars, we had menjo ceremonial at a small Chinese restaurant. In which David Huard, My most senior student, received his Shoden Renshi & Hyakue.



# Training with Kaiso

By Trevis Crane – Iwanami Dojo, Illinois

David Fazio Sensei and I were very fortunate to be able to visit the Honbu for three days of private instruction from Obata Kaiso in November. We ended up practicing a wide range of material from demonstration Toyama Ryu, to Nito-Ken (and Nito-Ken Tachiuchi!), to bamboo Tameshigiri to Tachiuchi. And of course we reviewed numerous other areas of the Shinkendo curriculum. Throughout the time we were there we tried to soak up as much of it as we could. We videotaped our practices, took notes, asked lots of questions and any time not spent eating, sleeping or walking between the hotel and the dojo was spent reviewing what we learned. Hopefully some of it will stick!

We arrived in the early afternoon of Thursday, and after checking in to the hotel and eating lunch we headed directly to the Honbu to start warming up and doing some light practice before Kaiso arrived. We didn't get started as soon as we would have liked because every few minutes some security guards would come by and ask what we were doing there. After several such conversations we finally convinced them that we were only there to practice Shinkendo and that Kaiso was expecting us. They seemed particularly interested in our video camera and making sure we were not going to tape anything inappropriate. Again, with a little work we persuaded them everything was OK, and then we got to practicing. I guess they just wanted to make sure we knew what we were getting ourselves into ☺

Since our plane had left Champaign-Urbana at 5:30 AM, and we hadn't stopped all day we were pretty weary, but when Kaiso arrived we did what we could to keep up, both mentally and physically. Tough, but when you only have so much time you squeeze every little bit out that can. There would be time enough to rest when we got home.

That first lesson, we went through a substantial amount of demonstration material – both Toyama Ryu as well as Tameshigiri. And then when it came time for the regularly scheduled class that evening, we hit it all again as well as other demonstration material. We kept practicing this material throughout our entire stay in L.A. and will hopefully find a venue to show it off in soon! So, after several hours working with Kaiso privately and then again during both the evening Aiki and Shinkendo classes, Saito Sensei gave us a ride back to our hotel and we crashed. We were beat and felt every bit of it.

The next day held more of the same plus a special treat. In Illinois, we don't have access to bamboo and are thus limited to practicing Tameshigiri solely on tatame-omote. And, although we felt like we were stumbling all over ourselves trying to figure things out the previous day, I suppose Kaiso was happy enough with what he saw that he decided to bring some bamboo for us to cut. What an experience!

There were several factors that contributed to the anxiety I felt going into this. First, I have never cut bamboo before. Couple that with the fact that Kaiso had us use one of his shinkens (granted it was a beater, but still, it was Kaiso's) and that he's there holding the bamboo, and what you end up with is a Tameshigiri session that's a bit more intense than

usual, to say the least. But very, very good! Few things make me regret living in Illinois as much as not having a good source of bamboo for cutting. Maybe we'll figure something out in the future.

In addition to the Tameshigiri, we covered a substantial amount of new Nito-Ken material, primarily Tachiuchi. We have been practicing with two swords for a little while now, but the stuff we worked on was brand new (to us) and fantastic, even if it left us feeling like we had two left feet (and arms). Working with one sword is hard enough, but as many of you know, once you add another things quickly get a lot more... interesting ☺ Every time I pick up a second bokuto, I get excited thinking about what Kaiso will introduce next time I train with him or at a seminar.

In addition to all the sword work that we did, Kaiso also introduced us to the bo. Up until now, we have not been teaching/training with the bo or in the Aiki arts. In our current space there's no practical way to teach the Aiki arts (as much as we would like to), but we can (and will) start to incorporate bo training into our curriculum after Kaiso gave us a good starter lesson with it. This is very exciting for both David-san and me. Just before we went to L.A. we were talking about how every time we watch the Bojutsu DVD we wish we could start practicing with the bo as well, but it's almost impossible to learn something new like that just from a DVD (well, impossible to learn it properly). So, we're very happy to have been given a primer, so to speak, in Bojutsu. It's always exciting (and a little bit daunting) to start something new again. You know there's SO much to learn and wonder how you'll ever do it. But I try to remind myself that that's how it was when I started Shinkendo, and I'm still young so I have plenty of time to learn!

In general terms, this trip was an important chance for us to reconnect with Kaiso, directly. He mentioned several times throughout our stay how vitally important it is for the instructors to maintain regular contact with him. If an instructor does not do this, s/he will soon be teaching something other than Shinkendo. They'll be teaching a shadow of what Shinkendo is or was. This is a disservice to a number of people and on a number of levels. Firstly, they are doing themselves no good. They're technique will not grow as it should and as one's Shinkendo technique stagnates, so, too, can the individual. Secondly, it is a disservice to one's students to not maintain regular contact with Kaiso. The students depend on the instructor for good instruction, and if the instructor does not train with Kaiso often enough, what s/he teaches students will be stagnant as well. Finally, as representatives of the ISF, all instructors are reflections of Shinkendo and by extension Kaiso's teachings, for good or bad. As instructors we have a responsibility to Kaiso and the ISF to maintain as accurate and current a representation of Kaiso's teachings as possible. And while this responsibility may be difficult to maintain, it should be remembered that it is a privilege and not a right or a burden. As we're all are aware, one of the strengths of Shinkendo is that it is still growing and evolving, and we are all extremely fortunate to be here to participate in that growth and evolution.

David Fazio Sensei and I would like to thank Obata Kaiso and Mrs. Obata for their considerable patience and hospitality during our time in L.A. We would also like to thank the students of the Honbu dojo with whom we were able to train. Their help is always appreciated.

# First Tameshigiri

By Gregor Manukian – Modern Samurai Dojo, New York

“The next few sets of string need to be cut longer to bind the full mats,” Mike Sempai says to me as he begins rolling another tatami mat. His words barely register; Lou Sensei telling me that I would be participating in Saturday’s tameshigiri session was still fresh on my mind. Although I have been studying Shinkendo for little over a year, this would be the first time I would be wielding a live blade and also using it to cut.

Mike and Keith Sempai could tell that I was feeling a bit anxious about the situation and offered words of assurance. Personally, my few minutes at the stand would be more than just another branch of the Shinkendo curriculum. To me this would be a chance to test myself, to prove to myself of what I am capable and consequently learn more about who I am. Often times we think either too little or too much of ourselves, and it’s in moments such as this when we look ourselves in the eye and realize the truth.

All concerns left my mind once Lou Sensei handed me the shinken. The sword was a little shorter than what I was used to and also a little lighter. All of that was of little consequence however. As soon as I lifted the sword into jodan gamae my mind became clear and focused on the cut. Thousands of suburi, hours of practice with my iaito, and invaluable instruction from Sensei, prepared me for this. The cut felt almost as though I were swinging the shinken through the air. After a few kesa cuts Sensei gave me the instruction to perform a left kiriage cut, which I hadn’t expected. Again the sword cut through the mat with ease. I was then instructed to perform yokogiri on the remaining stump, again a cut I didn’t expect to be doing. Once again the sword went through with ease.

Fortunately, the entire session was recorded on DVD. Since then I have watched myself several times, each time finding something new that needs improvement. Not only have I learned a great deal about my form and general ability, but the experience has put to rest some of the concerns I had about being able to perform tameshigiri successfully; I proved to myself that I would not shy away from a challenge nor would I falter under the pressure.

I would like to thank Sensei Lou for not only allowing me to partake in this tameshigiri session, but also for his patience, wisdom, insight, and dedication to his students and Shinkendo. I would also like to thank my classmates and friends who have served as examples and have been a great support. Lastly, I would like to thank Obata Kaiso for Shinkendo and allowing all of us to share in his wisdom and energy.

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## NEWSLETTER STAFF

### **PUBLISHER**

OBATA TOSHISHIRO KAISO

### **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

MICHAEL C. SHU

### **CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**

GREGORY SAMONCZUK

PAUL COACH

YUMIKO MATSUOKA

JEFFERY TIE

BRUNO ST-PIERRE

TREVIS CRANE

GREGOR MANUKIAN