

kendō-iaí-naginata

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Dr. Gordon Warner

It is with deep regret that we must mark the passing of Dr. Gordon Warner who died on the 4th March, 2010 at the great age of ninety-seven.

Gordon Warner was one of the very first foreigners to train in Kendō whilst living in Southern California, studying under the great Mori Teraō, *Hachidan Kyoshi*, as far back as 1937. He also trained at the famous Noda Dōjō in Tokyo until just before the outbreak of the Pacific War, leaving Japan in 1939.

In 1943 he was severely wounded at Bougainville when the tank he was in was hit by Japanese fire, shattering his left leg (which he subsequently lost). At that time he already held *sandan* rank although for the remainder of his long Kendo and Iai-dō career he always held that rank was of no importance to any student other, possibly, to give some indication of progress. He, together with Ben Hazard, founded the Berkeley Dōjō at the University of California, still flourishing to-day.



I first met Warner-sensei on my initial visit to Japan in 1967 through the introduction of Benjamin Hazard, *Nanadan Kyoshi*, and Donn Draeger-sensei. It was an introduction that I shall never forget. I was kneeling *seiza* at the side of the great Tokyo Budōkan, putting on my *bōgu* as I recall, when I became aware of a deep voice far above me saying my name. I looked up, first at white *hakama*-covered knees, then up to the chest, by now craning back my neck, and at the very top under a canopy of white hair, was Warner-sensei – all something like two full meters tall! At this point a beaming Hazard-sensei introduced me! I recall Draeger-sensei coming up at this point – and he was not far shy of two meters, himself – but here looking considerably shorter than Warner! The conversation that followed still is within my memory.

The occasion was the happy World Goodwill Kendō Taikai (which eventually led to the first World Kendō Taikai in 1970 – a very different affair, unfortunately). In the individual matches at the Budōkan Warner- by now *rokudan*, faced a young Japanese *sandan*. With his great height and upright stance because of his artificial leg, Warner took his usual *hidari-*

jōdan, towering over his diminutive and slim opponent. After some fast footwork the Japanese lad threw caution to the winds and attacked *hidari-kote* – and struck beautifully. There was a stunned silence for a second or two then the whole audience and the assembled Kendoka came to their feet to applaud – (no shouting, just applause that was well deserved). Warner-*sensei* lowered his *shinai* and bowed, too, in appreciation. I think that lad, now around sixty-five or so, has never forgotten! Just think that he achieved this remarkable feat in front of the Crown Prince, now Emperor! He lost, of course, but who cares?

Gordon Warner was the first non-Japanese to attain *nanadan* in Kendo and held the rank of *rokudan* in Iai-dō – Ōmori-ryū I think. I met him again in 1970 and briefly in 1975., but also kept up an occasional correspondence. After that he remained in Okinawa as Minister of Education. It is worthwhile noting that Dr. Warner married a Japanese lady who was the grand-daughter of the famous Satsuma-*han* patriot, Saigō Takamori, who, in an oft-remembered final battle of the 1877 civil war, committed *seppuku* in a cave in Kyūshū along with a number of his followers. Mrs. Warner came from a very high-ranking family, indeed.

Roald Knutsen

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What it means to belong to a Dōjō

A personal view - by Paul Whiteman, *go-dan*

Observations made in Japan taught me that in order to be considered a true member of a dōjō, purely turning up for practice on a regular basis was not enough.

A true member requires a level of awareness of what is going on around him within the dōjō itself. Being mindful of the needs, wishes and expectations of your seniors and teachers alike, and to always put others first is fundamental. A difficult concept for us in the West but by no means impossible.

The simple act of sweeping and washing the dōjō floor before a practise session demonstrates an attitude of unselfishness worthy of any samurai in the past.

In a dōjō there are teachers and there are students. It is the students responsibility to train hard and correctly so that all members of the group can advance in their Kendō. By 'correctly' I am talking in terms of posture, strikes, the use of *ki-ken-tai*, *zanshin*, and so on.

What all members must be especially vigilant of is the creeping in of bad habits such as bobbing and weaving the head like a boxer would. This kind of movement has no place in Kendō. By moving one's head like this to avoid being hit will not only mess up your own Kendō but also cause your opponent and fellow classmates to have to alter their perfectly straight strikes in order to land a cut. It doesn't take long before everyone is doing crap Kendō!

To inadvertently cause your classmates to pick up bad habits is wrong. You and your fellow students are all in the same boat and all share the same goal; that is to master the techniques of Japanese swordsmanship.

A desire to gain respect from your teacher is also an important thing to have. A good teacher will always want his student to attain a higher level of Kendō even than themselves. A teacher, (whether it is a Kendō teacher or any other kind), will be able to spot straight away someone who is passionate about learning, so they will push that student harder, nurturing them as they go, praising them when they can demonstrate an understanding of what is being taught. A student without this hunger to learn and train hard will soon get left behind.

A dōjō can take on a 'family' element with socializing after practise sessions, especially if they are weekend sessions! There was a group of Kendōka from the All Japan Agricultural Corporation who used to come to the Soushinkan Dōjō (where I trained) on Saturday's during my time in Japan. The practise session would start with thirty minutes *kata* followed by ninety minutes of *kirikaeshi*, *kakari-geiko* and a bit of *ji-geiko* at the end. Anyone who still had any energy left was made to do a final *kakari-geiko* from hell! I say 'made to', but in reality we all wanted to impress the owner of the dōjō¹, *Kaneko-sensei*, because it was he who made this dōjō possible.

Getting back to this group of guys, they always brought with them a mountain of meat and vegetables that we would cook up at the dōjō and chaw down in *sensei's* room. The beer and *ō-sake* flowed and we juniors would always be ready to fill someone's bowl or glass when it became empty. Evaporation is a huge problem in Japan! It was a pleasure to be part of that dōjō's family atmosphere. Having to tidy up afterwards didn't feel like a chore at all.

Being subservient to a certain degree is a good thing in a dōjō in England, but more so in Japan as the hierarchical system run deep. One of the *hachidan sensei*, by the name of *Iwanaga-sensei*, from *Kitakyūshū*, would drive fifty miles or so to our dōjō every Wednesday. He was a real character and if you were a few seconds late refilling his glass or lighting his cigarette, he would say: 'No, too late! You had your chance!' He was, of course, joking but he kept everyone on their toes. But it was this friendliness that was so appealing.

I, personally, am filled with a sense of gratitude to my seniors and teachers both here and in Japan for their help and support throughout my Kendō career. In the same way that we would be stuck if we didn't have doctors or surgeons when we get sick, if we didn't have our seniors and teachers to help us, our Kendō would stagnate into something that resembles a chicken fight. Appreciate what you have because a life without it doesn't bear thinking about. A dōjō only exists because of its students. Even, on some occasions, you don't fancy going to Kendō practise tonight, because you had a hard day or were stuck in traffic or something, just pick up your bogu, get into your car, drive to the dōjō and train! You'll feel the better for it, I guarantee.



Kendō at the Tonbridge Dōjō

Once again the training series was rewarding with a very good attendance by senior yūdansa, something very much to the advantage of the less experienced members, mudansa or ranking. To have the opportunity to see seniors ‘in action’ and to come up against them several times during practise always helps bring inexperienced errors into focus. Understanding is always built on clearly seeking out one’s weaknesses.

It was a very cold morning in the dōjō which ensured that all forms of training were brisk.

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A Chestful of Oni

One of the weirdest curiosities picked up some fifty years ago – the post-war period was an extraordinarily good hunting time for those intrepid souls interested in Japan – was this wonderful rosewood group of six nasty little demons violently forcing their way out through the sides and lid of a chest. The chest, itself, is surmounted by a large fierce ogre. All of these creatures are aggressively menacing anyone curious enough to approach within their reach whilst the ogre is clambering over the chest top prior to launching his attack.





The large figure represents a *yōkai* (demon, spirit, monster) commonly encountered in the folklore. The *yōkai* is nearly always horned, has glaring eyes, sharp rending teeth, strong claws and is clad in a tiger skin loincloth. This figure embodies all these characteristics. The precise symbolism of the smaller demons in their chest is not known though one wears a *yamabushi tōkin* (pillbox cap) and another is clearly a Buddhist priest. One suspects these have 'fallen from grace', another common theme in the folklore.



The standard of carving displayed by this group is beyond praise and the palpable menace of the figures is suggested by the details. It is unfortunate that some of the carving suffered minor damage long before it came into our hands, (H. Russell Robinson and



then to Pat Knutsen). One of the demons has lost his upper jaw, another his hand, and here and there some 'fingers' are missing; but it is not in any way beyond careful restoration.

Regarding size, the large ogre stands 250 mm on the wooden plinth. Unusually for such a fine piece, it is unsigned so it is difficult to give a precise date but it was probably carved between 1880 and 1900.

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The Kendō Reader by Noma Hisashi

Chapter Twenty: *Maai* (Distance and Interval)

Maai, in its broadest interpretation, in physical terms pertains to the distance or gap that is maintained between two swordsmen. In terms of time it pertains to the momentary lapses of awareness that are manifested in the opponent's mind. These may be compared to the swinging to and fro of a clock's pendulum. Extended further, it also embraces the concept of *Kyojitsu*. These momentary lapses of mind, and *kyojitsu*, we may call the '*kokoro-no-maai*', (mental interval). The import of *kokoro-no-maai* is that even though the physical distance between combatants may be mutually advantageous, the mental interval possessed by individuals will determine who will have the decisive advantage. Much of the true mystery of *maai* is encompassed within the workings of mental interval. As may be deduced from the old teaching: '*For him it is far; for myself it is close*'.

Moreover, *maai* is generally interpreted to mean the actual distance between combatants.

Among the specialised terms used in Kendō today are some that have remained unchanged for three or five-hundred years. Not all of these terms are particularly suitable for what they are supposed to describe, and we cannot help but think that they were a little vague and perhaps deserve new and more suitable interpretations. Be that as it may, these terms are used to express extremely subtle, technical, and spiritual concepts and therefore make redefining with more modern and appropriate terms a very difficult task. All said and done, at least for some time to come, we have to rely upon these traditional terms.

In Kendō there is the teaching: '*Issoku-ittō-no-ma*' or 'The distance equalling one step to make one strike'. This refers to the distance of about two metres between opponents, from which either opponent need advance only one step in order to strike the other; normally, most techniques are initiated from this distance, and a distance narrower is known as *chika-ma*, (close distance), and a distance greater is known as *tō-ma*, (long distance). At *tō-ma* there is a small margin of time to allow for a reaction to be made against the opponent's attack. But at *issoku-ittō-no-ma* exists almost no margin at all, so at this distance one's attention has to remain constant and unbroken. Furthermore, at *tō-ma*, if the opponent is fleet of foot and his footwork good, in other words, if *tō-ma* happens to be his strong point, then the situation becomes the same as that for *issoku-ittō-no-ma* and again one's guard cannot be relaxed in the slightest. Usually, however, there is comparative safety in taking up a position at *tō-ma*, as when rising from *sonkyo* to face the opponent.

It is not possible to leap into the attack from *tō-ma* unless one's footwork is up to the mark, therefore always endeavour to train from this distance as there are great advantages to be had from doing so. At *tō-ma*, an opponent inept at footwork and technique can be struck with ease while at the same time a position of safety can be maintained. Of the various *maai*, *chika-ma* is the least demanding physically and is thus the easiest to find oneself drifting into. To counter this, especially at the beginning of one's *shugyo*, always endeavour to train from *tō-ma*.

Concerning *maai* in more concrete terms, if the opponent, at *issoku-ittō-no-ma*, need take only one step in order to strike *men*, then it follows that if one takes one step to the rear the opponent's sword will fall short.

Again, if by retreating one cannot avoid the opponent's sword one may avoid it by stepping either to the right or left. Or else, one could avoid his blow by leaping straight into the opponent himself.

These actions belong to the tactics of *maai*. Consequently, we could say that *maai* is the way by which an advantageous distance is maintained through movement to the front, rear, left or right.

Even as one is trying to maintain a suitable distance from the opponent, he, too, is active for the same reasons, so one must continue to manoeuvre in accordance with his activities and the changing situation. 'Know the opponent's *maai* and know one's own'², and always take an advantageous position, though this is most difficult to do. First of all, it is vital to be aware of one's own *maai*. To know that, from a certain distance one can strike successfully, and from any other one cannot must be grasped thoroughly through regular training.

The beginner will come to understand his *maai* for striking through such exertions as *kirikaeshi* and *uchikomi*, and being taught that such and such a distance is enough for striking in, or striking stepping out, and so on.

It has already been said that every effort should be made to train from *tō-ma*, but at the same time, one must not neglect the study of *chika-ma*. Just as there are techniques from *tō-ma*, so too there are techniques from *chika-ma* and it is necessary to study these, too. Again, it is not a good thing to develop a bias towards either *tō-ma* or *chika-ma*; one must practice to be fully competent at any *maai*. Moreover, against one who is strong from *tō-ma* engage him at *chika-ma*, and against one adept at *chika-ma* engage him from *tō-ma*. The strategy of attacking the opponent where he is weakest is most advantageous.

If one could watch Miyamoto Musashi at *shiai*, one would notice although the opponent's sword appears to strike or thrust Musashi's head or breast, in fact, it fails to touch him at all. One day, when some of his more able pupils, who were amazed by this ability, asked him how he managed it, Musashi explained it like this:

'That is well noticed. It is known as '*tachisaki-no-mikiri*',³ and is the most important thing to do in *shiai* and *shinken shōbu*.

‘When you are a beginner you must train hard at the five positions. After that you may train in the way of *tachisaki-no-mikiri*. Without unnecessary use of the five positions you must learn to avoid being touched by the point of the opponent’s sword.

‘Just how does *tachisaki-no-mikiri* work? Well, you must gauge a distance of one inch between the point of the opponent’s sword and yourself. If there is at least a distance of one inch, even if he strikes or thrusts, the point of his sword will not touch you. If you are unable to gauge a distance of one inch his sword may strike you, so you must either receive or parry. However, at first, it may be difficult to gauge one inch, so first of all train by gauging a distance of five or six inches, and then four and three inches, gradually decreasing the distance until you can gauge one inch.

‘Well, there is no doubt that one inch is quite minute, but it is the way of *Kenjutsu* that what is of importance is usually minute and subtle. If you train with this in mind you will come to grasp the way of *mikiri*. From now on I shall instruct you in this.’

After this explanation he chose from among his students those skilled at footwork and had them attack him with various techniques while he called out to them the distance by how much the points of their swords were falling short, by one, two, three inches, and so on. On occasion he also struck back at his pupils. Purposely missing them and calling out the distances by which he missed.

The above story is taken from the ‘*Kenjutsu Raikuba Shū*,⁴ and is an excellent story concerning *maai*, and one worthy of contemplation.

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Naoe Kanetsugu (Part II)

Soon after the meeting described in the first part of this account, Hideyoshi adopted the family name of Toyotomi by which he is best known. He died in 1598 and soon after one of his other *Go-tairō*, or Council of Five Elders, Tokugawa Ieyasu, began to rise to power and scheming to overthrow the Toyotomi administration. Ishida Mitsunari, who was extremely vigilant on behalf of the Toyotomi-ke,⁵ was well aware of the treachery from the beginning. Although he was weak, having a mere 190,000 koku, a tenth of that received by Ieyasu, he was resolved to confront those who designed to destroy the Toyotomi.



Ishida Mitsunari

Kanetsugu fully supported Mitsunari seeing such intended treachery as totally opposed to proper decency and ethic. He declared that 'Justice must be served'. Between the two a strategy was formulated entailing the Uesugi to begin preparations for a military



Toyotomi Hideyoshi

campaign in Aizu. Such a move could not be ignored by Ieyasu as it constituted an outright challenge from a fellow *Go-tairō*. If he hoped to make himself the master of all Japan he must gather a force to meet and destroy the Uesugi threat. If the threat was seen as real and not a feint, then many other lords would argue that joining the Tokugawa would enhance their own advancement. While these lords allying themselves with Ieyasu were grouping to oppose the attack on Aizu, Mitsunari would raise his own army from his powerbase around

Sawayama and together with the forces of the other great lords who held the late Kampaku, Hideyoshi, in high regard, advance on the Kinai region around Kyōto. These allies were chiefly the Mori, Ukita, and Kobayakawa. Their strategy was to move both from the west and the east, thus squeezing the Tokugawa to submission.

When Ieyasu understood the Uesugi preparations as 'a plan to revolt' he sent an envoy demanding that Kagekatsu come to Kyōto to explain his intentions. The latter's reply is known as the '*Naoe-jo*'. Its contents can be put thus:

'I heard that there is a man who has forgotten the debt of gratitude he owes the late Taiko and is devoting himself in activities of self-interest and greed. And you are saying that the man is Uesugi? Surely you jest? From what I hear, you, sir, are preparing to come to Aizu. Please do come, I can then answer all your questions here.'

The courteous but bold declaration of war enraged Ieyasu and he made immediate plans to send his force to Aizu to take punitive action.. This declaration by Uesugi Kagekatsu was the start of events that soon led to the decisive battle of Sekigahara in 1600.

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With Tokugawa Ieyasu marching north, Ishida Mitsunari mobilised his forces but the cunning Ieyasu swiftly turned round and take vengeance. The Uesugi were committed to their planned strategy but were faced by the combined strength of Mogami Yoshiteru⁶ and Date Masamune which prevented them from pursuing the enemy. The Uesugi army was commanded by Naoe Kanetsugu but forced to withdraw despite furiously attacking the allies. In the meantime the 'western' armies and Ishida Mitsunari faced the Tokugawa 'eastern' strength at Sekigahara and were heavily defeated.⁷

Now Uesugi Kagekatsu and his Ō-karō faced another difficult decision. Kagekatsu is reported as saying: 'It is said that to win or to lose is a matter of fortune. We have the truth

to defend us that we rallied in order to preserve justice. Whatever the result of our action, I have no regrets.'

With feelings of deep despair, Kanetsugu was torn between fighting to the death – and the utter destruction of his family and clan – or abjectly kneeling before Ieyasu in order to save his family.

It was Kanetsugu who elected to attempt reconciliation with the Tokugawa. Naturally, he could not forgive the immorality of their enemy's action but he could not let his personal conviction lead to the ruination of the Uesugi-ke. His efforts in negotiation saved the family but at a huge loss of revenue and power. The surrender conditions saw the sequestration of 1.2 million *koku* leaving a mere 300,000 *koku*. In reward, Naoe Kanetsugu was given Yonezawa-jō and the lands, thus creating the combined Uesugi-Yonezawa domain that lasted until the end of the Edo period. Despite his straitened circumstances, lord Kagekatsu refused to turn off his 6000 retainers and continued to support them and their families. In order to accomplish this, the *Ō-karō* turned to developing new farm lands and was able to increase his lord's income from the meagre 300,000 *koku*. After this, Naoe Kanetsugu declared that now was the time for him to retire from his duties.



Uesugi Kagekatsu

It was with deep regret that Uesugi Kagekatsu looked at his faithful retainer and said: 'I have lost my lands but now you are telling me that I must lose you, too?' He fell silent.

But Kanetsugu continued to serve the Uesugi-ke until his death at the age of sixty in 1620. It is thought that before his death, Kanetsugu had intentionally dissolved his family so that his lands would go back to the Uesugi as a further economic help. The former *ō-karō* was admired by all for his unswerving loyalty to his lord.

Naoe Kanetsugu's personal effects and records are still preserved, supporting his reputation as an intelligent and courageous general and an excellent civil administrator. He enjoyed the reputation of being a cultured and intellectual man. He was the first to make use of copper print and published the '*Bun-sen*' (Naoe Edition). Scrolls and books from his valuable collection still remain housed in the Zenri-ji, built to house the Educational Institution of the Yonezawa-han. Truly, he was a remarkable and enlightened samurai.

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Notes

¹ The 'owner' of a dōjō usually means specifically the '*dōjō-nushi*'. This might be the senior sensei but, equally, it might not be. Care should be taken about the use of this term: 'owner' is the key word.

² Paraphrasing Sun Tzu in his *Ping-fa*: 'Therefore I say: 'Know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril' (Chap. III, v.31).

³ *Tachisaki-no-mikiri*: gauging the gap between oneself and the point of the opponent's sword.

⁴ *Kenjutsu Raikuba Shū*: said to have been written by Ueda Yorizō in 1912. It is a selection of stories and anecdotes taken from handed-down traditions.

⁵ The suffix '-ke' denotes 'family', hence 'Uesugi-ke', the 'Uesugi blood relations'.

⁶ Mogami Yoshiakira (1546-1614), the head of the clan, held deep resentment against Toyotomi Hideyoshi after his daughter, given in marriage to Toyotomi Hidetsugu, was beheaded on orders from the Taikō at her husband's downfall. It was for this reason that he sided with Ieyasu. Both the Mogami and the Date clearly saw their chance of advancement.

⁷ The Tokugawa strength was reckoned at about 80,000 and the 'western' confederates fielded some 130,00. When the battle (21st October 1600) ended the defeated side left around 30,000 dead on the field.