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UCHINA MENSOREE

AN INFORMAL NEWSLETTER SHARING TID-BITS
OF OKINAWAN CULTURE, EVENTS AND HISTORY

THIS MONTH IN OKINAWA

In June in Naha (Okinawa), the climate is wet with 383mm of precipitation over 20 days, the mean temperature average is 28°C.

Day length is 13:46 hours.

The sun rises at 05:37 and sunset is at 19:23.

CURRENT EVENTS

PILLARS OF THE LIGHT FOR PEACE (LIGHTS OF PEACE)

Date: June 22nd – 23rd

Place: 444 Mabuni, Itoman
(Peace Memorial Park)

June 23 is Memorial Day, a day to pay respects to the war dead who fell victim to the Battle of Okinawa and pray for everlasting peace. At the Peace Memorial Park, located on the Mabuni Hill in Itoman where the end of the battle took place, five beams of light, called the Pillars of the Light for Peace, are cast high up into the sky on the evening of Memorial Day and the evening before. The lights



cast into the night sky come from military-grade searchlights. Today, those searchlights emit powerful beams of light, to which people pray for peace, and they can be seen from as far

as downtown Naha. The lights pass the memories of history on to future generations as a way to keep tragic wars from ever happening again.





HISTORICAL EVENTS

BATTLE OF OKINAWA APRIL 1ST TO JUNE 22ND 1945

Summary: The battle of Okinawa, also known as Operation Iceberg, took place in April-June 1945. It was the largest amphibious landing in the Pacific theater of World War II. It also resulted in the largest casualties with over 100,000 Japanese casualties and 50,000 casualties for the Allies.

The battle has been referred to as the "typhoon of steel" in English, and *tetsu no ame* ("rain of steel") or *tetsu no bōfū* ("violent wind of steel") in Japanese. The nicknames refer to the ferocity of the fighting, the intensity of Japanese [*kamikaze attacks*](#), and the sheer numbers of [Allied](#) ships and armored vehicles that assaulted the island.

The strength and composition of the American landing force consisted of LTG Buckner's 10th Army of some 180,000 men. The 10th Army included MajGen Geiger's III Marine Amphibious Corps (1st, 2d, and 6th Divisions) and MG

Hodge's XXIV Army Corps (7th, 27th, 77th, and 96th Divisions). Moreover, the naval support consisted of more than 40 aircraft carriers and 18 battle ships (more than 14,000 ships in total) plus British support in addition to other landing craft and ships. The Japanese defenders' land composition (the naval support was not even a factor) was formed into the 32d Army (Ryukyu Island chain defense force) comprised of four divisions (9th, 24th, 28th, and 62d on Sakishima) plus additional home guard units.

The Japanese defenses were all but overwhelmed by June 16, and Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima realized that the end was near. On June 19, he dissolved his staff and ordered all available troops to go over to guerrilla operations. On June 21, organized resistance came to an end in the 6th Marine Division zone, which encompassed the southern shore of the island. By then,

Japanese troops were surrendering by the hundreds.

The 1st Marine Division mounted its final attacks of the campaign, also on June 21, and reported by nightfall that all its objectives had been secured. The XXIV Corps made similar announcements. It thus fell to General Geiger to declare Okinawa secure following a bloody 82-day battle.



BATTLE OF OKINAWA APRIL 1ST TO JUNE 22ND 1945



The final official flag-raising ceremony on a Pacific War battlefield took place at the Tenth Army headquarters at 1000 hours, June 22, 1945. Earlier that morning, Ushijima and his chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Isamu Cho, committed ritual suicide.



The battle had been among the most brutal of the Pacific War. The Navy suffered its greatest casualties for a single engagement. More than 12,000 Americans were killed and a further 50,000 were wounded.

More than 150,000 Japanese — many of them civilians — were killed during the battle. Despite the casualties, preparations were quickly underway for the long-anticipated invasion of Japan. All hands turned to in

order to begin preparations to invade Kyushu.

Already, Army Air Forces bomber groups that had been in Europe on V-E Day joined Marine Tactical Air Force units operating from Okinawa's airfields and thousands of American, British and Canadian carrier-based aircraft in the prelanding bombardment that was to lay waste to the southernmost Home Island before a contemplated October invasion was set in motion.

HIMEYURI (PRINCESS LILY) GIRLS

Just before the invasion of Okinawa, 222 girls and 18 of their teachers were recruited from the top 2 senior high schools in Naha to work as nurses. They initially went to the military hospital in Haebaru. The hospital itself was a network of dark and unpleasant caves, not conducive for medical practices. These girls had been more sheltered in their upbringing; their schools adopting a strict policy of keeping the girls away from boys. Even the smallest conversation with a boy would have severe consequences. Yet, these 16-18 year old girls were



suddenly thrust into the reality of a wartime hospital, with no training and no preparation.

When the October 10 raid demolished an earlier building in Naha, staff officers took the point about enemy airpower and decided to rebuild in a safer place, behind the Shuri Line. they chose a country site some

five miles southeast of Naha, three miles due south of Shuri. The Okinawa Military Hospital, as it was officially called, was a series of man-made caves dug into the sides of a large, grassy ridge bordering the tiny farming village of Haebaru.

All were assigned more or less at random, she to one of Ward Three's half-dozen caves for infectious diseases. (Ward One was for general medicine; Two for surgery.) Ward Three had quite enough to deal with even without further casualties.



HIMEYURI (PRINCESS LILY) GIRLS



Japan's tuberculosis rate was very high, partly because girls who had caught it while working in textile factories spread the disease in their villages when they were sent home with it. Attempts earlier in the war to send carriers among the troops — recruited largely from those same villagers — back to Japan from the conquered territories ended when American submarines ripped Japanese shipping lanes to shreds. Many soldiers were then returned to the front in the knowledge that no cure was possible. Now Okinawa's dank caves served as hatcheries for the bacillus.

The girls were forced to sleep in a tangle of arms and legs, with hardly enough room to draw breath. Every square yard of floor space was packed with grievously wounded soldiers, an average of sixty or seventy to a cave, a total of perhaps twice the hospital's planned capacity of a thousand patients.

Thick in grime and blackened blood, more wounded were carried in and laid on the floor. Relatively few had been hit by bullets. Shell fragments had caused most of the damage:

bones crushed, flesh gouged out, hands and legs blown off.

Space was found for the luckier ones on rock shelves cut into the walls. They were squeezed in there even more tightly than on the troopships that had brought them to Okinawa. Without the cross-ventilation from the unmade connection to the central tunnel, the only air was from the caves' narrow mouths; it penetrated no more than a few yards.

The Student Medical Corps would later enter the literature of martyrdom as the Himeyuri (Princess Lily) Girls. Although their lot was no harder and their casualties hardly greater than among Okinawan women, as a whole, the young daughters of the island's privileged families would make captivating characters for romantic literature and prettified Japanese films, cast in the glow of their pre-invasion purity.

Many would end the war in what would become known as the Cave of the Virgins — with little exaggeration; those young "princesses" of the best schools were more protected from the opposite sex than the boys.

Since the Confucian teaching to separate the sexes after the age of seven had arrived on Okinawa only with the Japanese school system of the 1800s, much of the island outside its few cities observed it less than rigorously until the general tightening of discipline during the war emergency after Pearl Harbor.

The strictest adherence had always been in the Himeyuri schools, where such lapses as exchanging a spoken or written word with a boy earned quick expulsion.

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Himeyuri monument stands by the Ibara third surgery shelter at which many of the lives of the students and teachers were taken away.



Every June 23rd, on which the fierce war ended, a number of people who survived from the war visit the monument in memory of the victims.



KARATE CORNER



Each month a different karate master from Okinawa will be featured. The one selected for June is....



HOHAN SOKEN

Founder of Shorin Ryu Matsumura Seito (sometimes called “Matsumura Orthodox”)

There are three major styles of Shorin Ryu in Okinawa, all of which are modern day systems. The modern day term of “Sho Rin” means “Pine Forest.” Ryu simply means “methods handed down.” Matsumura Seito is not part of these systems. Teacher Soken’s Shorin means “Young Forest.”

One of the greatest Karateka of the 20th century and perhaps one of the greatest Karateka of all time is the venerable old Grandmaster of Okinawan Shorin Ryu Karate, Hohan Soken. The old master retired from the arts in 1978 and was one of the world’s most respected Karate figures in his time. In 1974, “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” bestowed this honor on Master Soken.

In spite of this fame, the story of Hohan Soken’s career in the Martial Arts has rarely been

told. His lifetime spanned the old and the new. During his life, he was his work in Karate grow from a secret Okinawan fighting method into a world-wide practice. Master Soken made great contributions to Karate and Kobudo.

Hohan Soken was born on the island of Okinawa on May 25, 1889. This was the 24th year of the Meiji; history now calls this time period the Meiji Restoration. It was a time of great political upheaval. The old Ryukyu society was being completely modernized as were all areas of Japan. The old Samurai was being forced to abolish his way of life, to cut off his topknot hairstyle and work at whatever job he could find, usually working in the field as a common peasant. As if political troubles were not enough, the Ryukyu Islands

experienced numerous natural disasters during this time. Since 1879, there had been numerous typhoons and epidemics of disease which had caused widespread death and destruction. So, for Hohan Soken, born into one of Okinawa’s most prominent Samurai families, his future was not very certain.

As a young boy, Mr. Soken was forced to work in the fields beside the Okinawan peasants. So matters might have gone throughout Hohan Soken’s life except for his uncle, Nabe. Nabe Matsumura had learned his art from his grandfather, Sokon “Bushi” Matsumura. The famous Bushi Matsumura was Okinawa’s most famous Samurai; he founded Shorin Ryu Karate.



HOHAN SOKEN



Living past the age of 90, Matsumura had made his grandson, Nabe, heir to his Karate system. So, following the way of his ancestors, Hohhan Soken began his Karate training at the age of 13 under the guiding hand of his uncle. Soken was Nabe Matsumura's only student and was secretly trained in Okinawan Bushido, the art of the samurai. His training began in 1902 and continued for the next 76 years.

Working in the fields by day and in the dojo at night was a rigorous schedule that developed physical strength and mental discipline. Following the custom for Karate students, young Soken also sought out other Karate Sensei to tutor him. At the same time he began training under his uncle, Hohhan Soken also began training under another Karate Instructor, Ushi Tanme of Nishi-Hara village near Iho Beach. Ushi Tanme was famous for his Kobudo techniques.

As Hohhan grew to manhood, his martial arts training intensified. At the age of 23, Master Matsumura began instructing young Soken in the



secrets of the White Crane, or Hakutsura. Many men coveted the knowledge of White Crane; even the venerable master, Gichin Funakoshi, sought instruction in this technique but was refused. Master Matsumura taught the White Crane only to Hohhan Soken. Master Soken continued training under his Karate Sensei's in Okinawa until the 1920's and throughout the 1930's.

Under the Japanese influence, Karate in Okinawa during this time underwent a certain amount of change, and became more of a sport. Tournament sparring was introduced; stances became longer and wider. Japan was at war with China and many things of Chinese origin were discouraged. In 1936, even the name of Karate was changed

from its former meaning, "Chinese Hand," to "Empty Hand." The Japanese were molding Karate into a sport, like Judo and Kendo.

Meanwhile, Hohhan Soken was living in Argentina, so his Karate did not undergo changes that Karate in Okinawa experienced. However, Hohhan Soken researched his Kata and techniques, making variations where needed.

In 1945, when he was 56 years of age, he returned to Okinawa and found Karate greatly changed. Unhappy with the changes he found, Master Soken refused to join the more fashionable Karate associations. He soon set about to teach his style of Shorin Ryu, Matsumura Seito Karate and Kobudo. Master Soken continued to research Kata and sent his students to learn from other Sensei throughout Okinawa. Much of the organized instruction of Kobudo found today originated from Master Soken's efforts. Grandmaster Soken was active in the Okinawan Historical Society and President of the Okinawan Kobujitsu Association.





HOHAN SOKEN

Until his retirement in 1978, Master Soken was widely sought by Karate Sensei of many styles to teach advanced techniques in both Karate and Kobudo. However, only one man, Fusei Kise, is generally acknowledged to have achieved full proficiency in the Matsumura Seito system under Master Soken.

Master Soken's Karate Kata were Hakutsuru, Naihanchi Sho Dan, Naihanchi Ni Dan, Chinto, Pinan Sho Dan, Pinan Ni Dan, Gojushiho, Kusanku, Seisan, Rohai Sho, Rohai Ni, Rohai San. Master Soken introduced the Pinan Kata into the Matsumura Karate-do. Those of us who practice Shorin Ryu Matsumura Seito

practice Master Soken's version of the Pinan Kata.

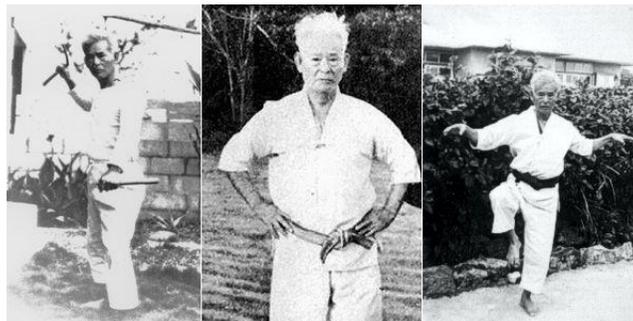
Master Soken's favorite Kata was the White Crane or Hakutsuru Kata. He is the third generation since Bushi Matsumura to learn this kata. Master Soken practiced and taught Kobudo with the Kama, Nunchaku, Bo, Kusari Kama, Sai, Tonfa, and Surchin. His favorite Kobudo kata was Tsuken Bo.

Grandmaster Soken deserves a great deal of gratitude from karateka all over the world. He maintained a pure style, and his Shorin Ryu Matsumura Seito Okinawan Karate and Kobudo has remained much the same as it was in the time of his

ancestors. He was instrumental in maintaining Kobudo as an active martial art and his efforts have led to the growth and development of the All Okinawan Kobudo and may have saved the art from extinction.

For those of us who were fortunate enough to have trained with Master Soken, we have experienced something very rare.

<http://www.ismskf.com/master-soken/>



WORDS OF WISDOM

Uya yushi kwa yushi. - Parents and children teach one another.
Okinawan Proverb

