

Masahilo Nakazono Memorial Aikido Event
27th – October ~2007

The Event

*In Memory of the Life and Work of Masahilo Nakazono
Sensei*

Organised by The Committee for UK Martial Arts History

(A combined group of students and teachers involved in the preservation of true legacies of the great original teachers)

On May the 14th 2005 the committee organised what is considered to be the most successful Martial Arts Event in Britain to date the “ Kenshiro Abbe Jubilee Celebrations “ . It was the intention of the committee to establish the true history and legacies left in our care, not just for the students of today, but for the generations that follow in the future. This Budo event was so successful in establishing the history, legacy and lineage of Kenshiro Abbe Sensei, and the genuine direct students from his arrival to the UK in 1955. As a result of that great event, there are now many more martial arts students who were not aware of the importance of the influence of Abbe Sensei on British Budo, they now have a greater understanding of our proud history which we trust will be passed on to their students.

Another important figure from that era was Mutsuro Nakazono (now Masahilo). Committee members once again put their organising skills together to celebrate the memory of this great Budo master who was perhaps one of the most popular of all Japanese teachers.

Saturday the 27th of October 2007 was a great day for the history of British Aikido, as approx 250 students gathered to remember one of the greatest names in the origins and development of Aikido in the United Kingdom. The Event was sponsored by Gwynne Jones Sensei of the Shin-Gi-tai Aikido Society Wales UK., one of the UK's largest Aikido organisations. The whole Event went as perfectly as a Harrison clock.

The First UK Aikido Dan Grades

Kenshiro Abbe Sensei taught the very early style of Aikido as taught to him by O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba. In 1963 he invited Nakazono Sensei to visit the UK from his base in Paris France. Nakazono Sensei brought with him the then more modern approach to Aikido, which had changed from the pre-war days as taught by Abbe Sensei. Nakazono Sensei left an indelible mark on all those students that had ever studied with him. Of all the Japanese teachers that have ever visited the UK there is no one that the original Dan grades respected more than Masahilo Nakazono Sensei. There are now only four students left from that incredible period in the 1950's & 60's who had been graded to Yudansha in Aikido by Kenshiro Abbe Sensei and Nakazono Sensei. They are Sensei's K Williams – H Foster – H Ellis – D Eastman. Williams Sensei could not attend the event; the organisers were pleased to receive a letter of support from Williams Sensei. Sensei's Foster – Ellis and Eastman were there.

The Principal Teacher `Jiro Nakazono Sensei`

The acceptance of Jiro Nakazono Sensei the second son of Masahilo Nakazono sensei to attend this Event, to honour his fathers name, was now going to make this event all the more memorable. Nakazono Sensei travelled from his home in Manhattan, USA to attend this one day event at the Neath Sports Centre, Neath, Wales. There was an incredible atmosphere in the large hall of the Neath Sports Centre as the Kodo drums played in the background. The drums were silenced as Henry Ellis went on the mat to speak of the early days of Aikido and the influence that Masahilo Nakazono had on the development of British Aikido. Ellis Sensei then introduced the teaching line up of Jiro Nakazono Sensei – Dang Thang Phong Sensei – Gwynne Jones Sensei - Haydn Foster Sensei – Derek Eastman and not forgetting himself. There were several prominent VIP guests who were then introduced. There were letters of congratulations from N Tamura Shihan and K Williams Sensei for both Foster Sensei and Ellis Sensei as they celebrated their 50th year of Aikido.

The introductions were now over and the students sat in total silence as Nakazono Sensei stepped on the tatami to teach his first class of the day. The three old students of his father looked at each other and commented "*It's just like seeing Masahilo Nakazono Sensei again*" It was a touching moment. Sensei then proceeded to demonstrate some of the techniques that his father had been famous for. For the students who had only read and heard stories of Masahilo Nakazono Sensei this was a day they will talk about long into the future. Nakazono Sensei left the tatami to a tremendous round of applause from the appreciative students.

Guest Teacher Dang Thong Phong Sensei

Dang Phong Sensei had studied with Masahilo Nakazono in South Vietnam in the early sixties whilst training the South Vietnamese Paratroopers during the conflict there.

Phong Sensei had studied at the Aikikai with O'Sensei. He had been a prisoner of the Viet Cong Army for over 8 years and finally escaped on his 18th attempt.

Phong Sensei although well known in the USA and France was relatively unknown to the organisers of this event. After he stepped on the mat and demonstrated just a few techniques we all looked in awe at this incredible man who has left his mark here in the UK.

Phong Sensei is a gentle mild mannered man until he steps on the mat where he becomes a human dynamo he is a most impressive Aikidoist.

Haydn Foster Sensei

Haydn Foster Sensei one of the first Aikido Dan grades in the UK and a student of Kenshiro Abbe Sensei – Tadashi Abe Sensei – Masahilo Nakazono Sensei - took the next class and certainly did not look like his 80 years. He still teaches with a passion that has never wavered, his Irimi nage looked as powerful to day as it did when we were all at the Hut Dojo in the early days.

Derek Eastman Sensei

Derek Eastman who will celebrate his 50th year of Aikido next year (2008) was next, Eastman sensei is unique in his style as he remembers all the different styles of the early teachers and demonstrates them all to the fascinated students. He demonstrated how the various early masters varied in their techniques and with an incredible memory for detail.

Henry Ellis Sensei

Henry Ellis taught the only way he knows with very powerful Nikkyo and Tenchinage projection techniques, explaining to the students that working with a overly compliant Uke can damage your technique as one will never learns to adjust to ``different`` variations of attack. He also explained that in the early days Ukemi was no more than escape or protection for your Uke, where as now most Uke's are more like gymnasts or acrobats as they virtually fly around the mat as they are used more to make their teacher look ``fantastic``. Ellis Sensei said

“Whether you go prettily or ugly, your going! “.....

The Tanto Presentation

Jiro Nakazono Sensei was surprised as his second session was politely interrupted to present him with a beautiful hand made Tanto to the memory of his father. The Tanto had been lovingly created by Dave Rogers Sensei in Albuquerque New Mexico USA. Rogers Sensei makes individual hand made Bowie knives for the USA Special Forces. This Tanto for Nakazono Sensei was the most special task he had ever undertaken, including a beautiful carved presentation case. Nakazono Sensei was very pleased and said his Mother would place the Tanto alongside his father's shrine.

Presentation of 50 years of Aikido

Later in the day Sensei Ellis was also interrupted and he was also presented with a hand made Tanto by Sensei Rogers to celebrate his 50th year of Aikido. There were many people involved in the planning of this presentation, yet Ellis Sensei was taken fully by surprise and could not speak for a while. It is rare to see any emotion from Sensei, yet for those that know him he was a very happy man.

Gwynne Jones Sensei

Jones Sensei is known for his fluid style of powerful but very smooth style of Aikido as he demonstrated various Tenchinage movements. Jones Sensei was the host for this Aikido spectacular which will be talked about for a long time to come.

Spectacular Success

There was no doubt that the event was a spectacular success which ended with a raffle with a first prize of a valuable Shinken sword presented by Nine Circles Budo Supplies. Next, a Nakazono family Hakama with embroidered kanji presented by Jiro Nakazono Sensei. Phong Sensei presented nine of his books which were all signed. Henry Ellis presented 3 copies of the book Positive Aikido all signed. Billy Doaks Sensei and Keith Morgan Sensei presented several of their DVD's.

All the participants received a high quality souvenir programme designed on the famous Event with Kenshiro Abbe Sensei and Masahilo Nakazono Sensei at the Royal Albert Hall. London, in 1963.

There is a DVD available of this event, supplied and produced by Jon Stokoe Sensei of CUA Aikido. The DVD is £10-00 plus £1 postage and packing. Please contact on the email below,
dvd@nakazono.aberaikido.aberaikido.org.uk