

# TABA SENSEI

By Jerry Figgiani

**S**adly, I received word that this past Friday, July 7, 2012, Kensei Taba Sensei passed away at the age of 79. This news made me pause and reflect on the impact this loss will have on many in the martial arts world. My initial contact with Taba Sensei was in 1991 when Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine passed the title of Soke to his son Takayoshi Nagamine. Later, in 2007, I was asked by Sensei Terry MacCarrone to represent a group from New York and travel to Dayton, Ohio. This was to support a seminar that Taba Sensei was doing for the American Shogen Ryu Association here in the United States under the direction of Sensei Tony Partlow. There was a strong connection between Taba Sensei and Sensei MacCarrone's sensei, Ansei Ushiro, who had been the first Okinawan instructor to come to the United States. Last year an interview I did with Kensei Taba was featured in the Summer 2011 Masters Magazine.

My visits with Taba Sensei, which later led to the interview, gave me insight into this great master's character. At one time, Taba Sensei was the president of the World Matsubayashi Ryu Karatedo Federation, and he was one of the senior students of Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine. Taba Sensei later established his own organization which was named Shogen Ryu. The "Sho" represents Shoshin Nagamine and shows the Matsu link to Matsubayashi Ryu while "Gen" means original or the root of Okinawan Karate. Taba Sensei also trained with legendary karate masters Hohan Soken and Chosin Chibana.

As with any legendary instructor from Okinawa, one could talk about his ability to transfer the traditions of the arts through as well as his ability to specialize in aspects of the martial arts such as kata, kumite, bunkai and the list could go on and on. What impressed me most about Taba Sensei was not only his martial arts skills, but his ability to relate to people and make them feel part of the whole. He embodied the spirit of martial arts, not only physically, but on every level; mentally and spiritually.

In 2009, I was asked by Takayoshi Nagamine to come to Okinawa. This was during the 2009 World Championships. I also visited Taba Sensei at this time. After being in Taba Sensei's presence, the quality of his character was evident in many ways. In observing an instructor's rapport with his students, you can gain a lot of knowledge about the individual. It was evident how much mutual respect was between Taba Sensei and his students when being in their presence. Taba Sensei's strong character was evident in the treatment of my students and I when visiting Okinawa in 2009. He graciously opened not only the doors to his dojo, but the doors to his home. He spent an entire week with my students and I allowing us to experience the beauty of Okinawa as well as its history and traditions, which were passed on to us. There was a genuine sense of belonging in his presence, whether you were part of his group or not. There were no political ramifications. He treated everybody with equal respect because of their connection to the martial arts.

The martial arts world truly lost a great master, one who was not in it seeking fame or fortune, but to pass down an art that was handed down generation-to-generation without holding back his knowledge. The Shogen Ryu Organization is not a large organization, however, the people involved on the island of Okinawa share a strong commitment to keep Taba Sensei's teachings alive. Okinawa has its leadership in place with Kiyomasa Maeda Sensei along with the support of Sadahiro Makino Sensei. Sharing this commitment in keeping Taba Sensei's teachings strong on the North American continent are the United States representative Sensei Tony Partlow and Canadian representative Sensei Jerry Pilon. I am confident in their commitment to keeping Taba Sensei's teachings alive.

The martial arts world has lost not only a great karate master but a true gentleman in Kensei Taba. Those fortunate to meet him and experience his presence, I believe, will continue to keep his spirit alive. On behalf of the martial arts community, our heartfelt condolences go out to the family and students of Taba Sensei. 

