

Midori Yama Budokai: *Hanshi's Corner*
Written by Ron Rogers *Hanshi Meiyo Kyoju*

April 2011

Ichi go, ichi e: One life, one meeting

**Leo D. Wilson, Grandmaster, Soke Dai, Kancho, Shihan, Sensei
Founder of Midori Yama Judokai and Midori Yama Budokai**

As conceived by its founders: “The object and purpose of Midori Yama Budokai, Incorporated shall be to study the ancient martial arts of the orient as well as Europe. Books and white papers will be written to attempt to understand the religious and meditative processes that are contained in the Martial Arts. We will also attempt to define the manner in which the Martial Arts conform to the human bodies of Asia and in the process try to correlate these art forms with the western human body. All such material that may [be] written will be given freely to other such groups that may desire this material. We will get together with other such groups and physically study moves that are involved in the martial arts, and we will give clinics to similar groups that desire to know the details of our studies.”

Although known as a NASA engineer and technician, Wilson *Shihan* was best known to those in Midori Yama Budokai as a martial artist without peer. At his passing 01 April 2000, he had spent over 46 years of his life studying human motion.

He was raised in Elizabethtown, KY – about 250 miles SW of Florence, KY. He lived there from the third grade to Sr. graduation. You go to Lexington and take the Blue Grass Highway to E-Town. His sister still lived there in 1991.

Wilson was a 14-year old living in Kentucky when his love for the Asian fighting arts began. His martial arts career began in Louisville, KY, with Master Fan Gin Han. As stated, Wilson lived in Elizabeth town, KY, but often went to Louisville. One day he and a friend visited the YMCA martial arts program. Wilson stated, “My Master ‘Fan Gin Han, taught nine students his style of Jujitsu, which he simply called ‘Jujitsu.’ He was a master of Jujitsu, and other Japanese and Chinese forms. He was a spy for Japan against China, during their war of 1935”. He had tried boxing and was OK at it, but he wanted to try something else, something more suited to him and the throwing looked like fun. Leo Wilson became interested in self-defense. His reason? “To get out of a gang.” Therefore, he learned to do what was necessary to stop fighting. He learned to fight

He had to travel (hitchhike) fifty miles each way, three times a week. The cost was an astounding fifty cents a class. If he were late, he could not work out, but only sit and watch. Many years later, Mr. Wilson found that Master Han taught aiki jujutsu, which Han simply referred to as jujutsu. Master Han never mentioned belts, ranks or anything of a similar nature; he simply trained his students by “working the circle.” After some time studying with Han, Mr. Wilson noticed a separate class that he began to study and practice on his own. When Master Han discovered Mr. Wilson’s “stolen moves,” he began teaching Mr. Wilson Eagle Claw Kung Fu. During initiation, under the threat of death, Wilson was pledged to secrecy. His Master taught the nine students and never accepted others. Wilson *Kancho* told his students about his Eagle Claw training after two

books appeared on the market which contained a great deal of information in which he was trained. Consequently, he felt he did not break his pledge and his secret of almost forty years remained a secret. He found out his instructor had been dead for approximately 37 years at that time. Wilson later stated, "When I studied under *Sensei* Han, I did not know what a black belt was, and did not until I entered the Navy a little less than four years later."

There was no charge for these lessons, and lessons ended abruptly when Mr. Wilson was drafted into the military. He was in the Navy in WWII. He was an Electronic Technician and a First Class Radio Operator. Because the Navy was so short of ships, he attended a commando (Amphibious Commando Squad, forerunner of the Navy Seals) training camp at Fort Wallace, Texas in 1944. He and members of his outfit were highly trained in the *jujutsu* techniques of pre-landing squads. He furnished communications for a marine rifle squad that landed on several fronts of the Pacific Islands. A Commander in the Navy, who, at the time, was the highest ranked black belt in the western world, set up that training camp. However, since he was seldom there, I can't remember his name.

During the war, Wilson went to Miami University at Oxford, Ohio. He spent a lot of time in Cincinnati, and knew that entire area quite well – including Covington.

While in the Navy, Wilson worked out with wrestlers in Ohio and taught a self-defense class. At Camp Wallace, TX, Wilson met Lt. Cmdr. Emilio "Mel" Bruno. Bruno Sensei taught Mr. Wilson *judo*, at which the young Wilson excelled. So much so, he became All Navy *Judo* Champion. He earned his first black belt after beating seven combatants in a 1944 navy sponsored tournament at Texas A&M. The next year he defeated five athletes and advanced to second degree black belt. For the first time, Mr. Wilson learned of ranks and the different styles of combat. Even in later years, Mr. Wilson believed, "*jujitsu* is everything and everything is *jujitsu*."

When he was in the Navy he went to Miami University, and then to Texas A&M. During that time frame, he was in the Navy as a Radio/Technician 1st Class, and at Miami University, he was taught international Morse code. His speed exceeded 40 WPM. He did so well in receiving radio international code, and becoming a technician, he was sent to an advanced school at Texas A & M. It was from there that he was sent to the fleet amphibious commando marine school at Camp Wallace, Texas. He trained with the marines in what they called a five-man rifle squad then. Actually, it was a first assault squad, which went ashore to gather information, and direct naval big gun fire where it was directed. He was a member of the Armed Forces martial arts group in Camp Wallace, Texas, and, as mentioned, helped train Marines in *jujutsu*. He transferred to advanced electronic school at Miami University at Oxford, OH, and graduated with honors as second highest among 2000 students. When they found out he could fight, they sent him to Camp Wallace to teach the Marines. He was also taught things he did not know about weapons and UDT. He was assigned to an LSM (Landing Ship Medium), which ran up and down the Texas coast, and to some Florida Islands. He and the crew learned how to make landings and studied how to disarm underwater mines, and demolish underwater bunkers. This was to prevent their ripping the bottoms out of their landing crafts when covertly debarking. He was in a Marine Amphibious Assault Squad, where he was the communication person.

At the first part of the war, the United States had lost so many ships, people were used in ways for which they were not normally trained. Wilson graduated with his marine squad,

as far as he knew, the only one that ever did. They presented him with a marine uniform in front of 2000 marines – it was something he would never forget. He believed the only reason he made it was because he was trained by a very special Master of martial arts techniques, and was already an expert rifle shot. His father worked for the Gold Vault at Fort Knox, KY and the first men that were sent there were all experts in weapons, and could do amazing things with guns. They shot 50 rounds per day every day of their working life.

After discharge from the Navy, he was an electronic engineer and worked 29 years for the government. His first job was in Panama City Florida, where he worked with the US Naval Mine & Torpedo Countermeasure Station. He attended Motorola integrated systems training at the Redstone Arsenal, in Huntsville, AL. Wilson attended several schools via the Navy, Army and NASA, including Texan A&M, Miami, the University of Alabama at Huntsville and five IBM schools to increase his training in digital types of computers. He earned master's degrees in science, electrical engineering and computer engineering and a doctoral degree in solar physics. He stated that school and work always came easy. Martial Arts were always hard. That's why he enjoyed them so much. He ran the acceptance test at IBM in Oswego, NY, and accepted the first flight computer for the Saturn vehicles. He helped to design the flight computers between Pershing and Saturn 1, 1B and 5, which took astronauts to the moon and back.

During this time, Wilson Sensei began teaching *jujutsu* and *karate* from his home in Huntsville, AL. When your *hanshi meiyo kyōju* began studying with Wilson *Shihan*, he referred to what he taught as “*jujutsu/karate*,” making no distinction between the two. The *dojo* was a converted garage attached to his home on Green Mountain. The area was expanded twice, becoming 42' by 36'. His school was originally referred to as SOMA (School of Martial Arts).

An *aikido* school rented space at the *dojo*. Col. Tom Bearden, *Sensei*, taught the classes. Soon, senior *judoka* were training with Wilson *Sensei*. Wilson *Sensei* traced his training in *jujutsu* and *karate* to the following styles: Kung Fu Long Fist, Eagle Claw Kung Fu, Chin Na, Pa Kua, *Daito Ryu* (*aiki jujutsu*) and *Cheena Aida Jujutsu*. Leo D. Wilson, *Kancho*, studied *Kodokan Judo*, *Shotokan Karate-do*, *Tae Kwon Do*, *Daito Ryu Aiki Jutsu* and *Savate*. In addition, he studied Eagle Claw Kung Fu. From these, he developed SOMA (School of Martial Arts). In 1973, SOMA became Midori Yama Judokai, which was influenced by Chakras Judo and Karate, USJA and Yoseikan Aikido. Among those instrumental in forming MYJ were Leo D. Wilson, Ron Rogers, William J. Rawls, Larry Beard and Millard Shelton. In 1974 Leo D. Wilson, *Kancho*, and Ronald L. Rogers formed Midori Yama Budokai. MYB primarily taught five arts (Eagle Claw came much later!). These were Midori Yama Judokai, Midori Yama Ju-Jitsu Kai, Midori Yama Karate Kai, Midori Yama Aikido Kai and Midori Chikara Age Kai.

Master Fan Gin Han (sometimes spelled Fan Gin Hun) was Leo's primary instructor, teaching *jujutsu*, *aiki jutsu* and Eagle claw. Through the years, Wilson *Kancho* studied with many other instructors, sometimes bringing them to his *dojo* at his expense. Among these was Professor Takahiko Ishikawa (leader of the USJF) in Memphis, Tenn., and later at his headquarters in Arkansas. In 1969, Ryozo Nakamura *Sensei* (all *Judo* champion), worked privately with Wilson *Kancho* in his (Wilson's) gym for a week. Wilson *Kancho* and his students also studied with Keiko Fukuda *Sensei*. In his earlier years he studied with Emilio Bruno and John Keehan and later had Professor Phil Porter and Rick Mertens

as instructors for his students. Other instructors who taught at Wilson Kancho's dojo were Patrick Auge and Glen Pack of Yoseikan. In addition, T. E. Bearden of Yoseikan also taught at Green Mountain. Ron Rogers worked with Professor Ishikawa and Fukuda Sensei, as well as Patrick Auge, Glen Pack, T. E. Bearden, Phil Porter and Rick Mertens. In his later years, Wilson *Kancho* not only visited the Kukikwon, but also was asked by Yudo masters to teach there during his visit.

Wilson *Shihan* received his *Godan* (5th degree black belt) for *judo* in 1980. In 1981, Wilson *Shihan* established Shinko Kaiten Aikido (now referred to as Midori Yama Budokai Aikido), having sponsored *Yoseikan Aikido* for the previous five years. In addition, in 1981, Wilson *Shihan* met with seven other *jujutsu* schools under the auspices of AAU. At this meeting, the ranks and experience were acknowledged by all schools, forming an alliance of the top *jujutsu* schools in America. In 1988, Wilson *Shihan*, a 10th degree black belt by this time, was awarded the prestigious Bud Estes Memorial Pioneer Jujitsu Award for 48 years of service to the martial arts in America. Part of this service was the founding of Midori Yama Budokai, "an organization of individuals, but all one family – by choice. We honor and respect our diversity."

Wilson *Shihan* received a 7th dan black belt in Tae Kwon Do in 1993 and a 7th dan black belt in Hapkido in 1995. Shortly before his untimely passing, Wilson *Kancho* was promoted to 9th degree black belt in Yudo, one of three (at that time) non-Koreans to achieve that rank.

Although never taught as part of a class, or as a class, Wilson *Kancho* taught both meditation and massage. He never referred to any particular type of massage (*amma*, *shiatsu*, etc), but taught muscle relaxation by massaging the acupuncture points. He especially emphasized massage of the points on the legs, and could tell the tension in different parts of the body from the tension in the legs.

As far as the meditation, Ruth Wilson, *Kyoshi*, wrote: "Yes, Leo did teach meditation. [He taught it] only to the people in his class at our gym on the mountain. He never taught it at any clinic and it was always held at the end of the class as sort of a way to have everyone feel relaxed. He would always have us sitting cross-legged in a relaxed position and would have us concentrate on a word that we would pick out ourselves. We would think of this word while he was talking to us. His voice had sort of a droning quality to it and each session was very short, maybe five to ten minutes. It was mainly getting each part of your body relaxed and deep breathing exercises. He always called it TM. Sometimes after the class was over, I was in such a relaxed state when we went into the house he would have to take me through a routine to get me more alert. I think that I got relaxed too much and was like hypnotized."

Wilson *Kancho* worked with your *hanshi meiyo kyōju* with this meditation process.

Through the years, Wilson *Kancho* studied with many other instructors, sometimes bringing them to his dojo at his expense. Among these were Professor Takahiko Ishikawa, Ryozo Nakamura Sensei and Keiko Fukuda Sensei. In his earlier years, he studied with Emilio Bruno and John Keehan and later had Professor Phil Porter and Rick Mertens as instructors for his students. Other instructors who taught at Wilson Kancho's dojo were Patrick Auge and Glen Pack of Yoseikan. In addition, T. E. Bearden of Yoseikan taught at Green Mountain. Ron Rogers worked with Professor Ishikawa and Fukuda Sensei, as well as Patrick Auge, Glen Pack, T. E. Bearden, Phil Porter and Rick

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