

ABRIDGED KARATE HISTORY
OF
MASTER PHILLIP W. KOEPEL
(Prepared by Mr. John Hutchcroft)

JAPAN

The year was 1956 and the Korean War was recent history when Phillip Koeppele enlisted in the United States Navy. He was just 18 years old and stationed in Yokohama, Japan when his interest in martial arts drew him to start karate lessons not far from his base.

Mr. Koeppele took his first karate lesson from Yoshio Kawaguchi, a Wado-ryu stylist on 4 1/2 Street, Yokohama, Japan. After studying for several months he heard of another sensei, Richard Kim, now a well-known martial arts author and sensei. Mr. Kim was an U.S. Army Intelligence Officer who was teaching Shorinji-ryu at Friers Gym, also in Yokohama. Mr. Koeppele studied with Mr. Kim for approximately one year. Mr. Kim's command of English was excellent (he was an American citizen), and Mr. Koeppele progressed quickly.

HAWAII

One thing is certain about military life...uncertainty, and after Mr. Koeppele had been in the dojo one year he was transferred to his next duty station, Wahiwa, Hawaii. By this time martial arts were in his blood, so his first priority was to find another teacher. Little did he know that he would study with a martial arts legend, Adriano Emperado, founder of Kajukenbo. During this time Kajukenbo was in its infancy and Phillip Koeppele had an opportunity to train with Mr. Emperado during this exciting period of the style's history for approximately one and half years. The system did not have any kata or forms per se, and later, in order to preserve the techniques he had learned, Mr. Koeppele wrote the five Niko Budo forms which are still practiced today.

UNITED STATES

Again, the Navy would interrupt Mr. Koeppele's martial arts training, this time with an Honorable Discharge when his enlistment ended. Mr. Koeppele was anxious to

continue his training when he came home to the United States. He asked Mr. Emperado about teachers in the U.S. Mr. Emperado told him that good instructors were scarce, but he knew of a Chinese martial artist in China Town in San Francisco and he had heard there was another prominent teacher in Phoenix, Arizona named Robert Trias. Mr. Koepfel returned home to Peoria, Illinois. Arizona may as well have been half way around the world. Air travel was expensive and a jaunt to Phoenix, Arizona was a major travel plan. Mr. Koepfel did what he needed to do to keep practicing and opened a small dojo in Peoria. At the time he didn't know that his dojo was the first karate school in Illinois. Even the Chicago area where one would expect some martial arts interest offered only a few judo clubs. Later that year Mr. Koepfel read a story in Popular Mechanics magazine about Robert A. Trias, his United States Karate Association, and how Mr. Trias had learned karate during World War II. The article also listed a phone number and address for the United States Karate Association.

Mr. Koepfel was compelled to call him. Both were Navy men who had started their martial arts training overseas and it seemed they had similar goals. With that phone call an era of martial arts history had begun. Mr. Koepfel joined the USKA in 1960, later becoming Mr. Trias' first student in the Midwest. Mr. Koepfel learned from Mr. Trias at every opportunity and in 1963 Mr. Trias hosted the first World Championships in Chicago, Illinois.

In the following 22 years Mr. Koepfel's reputation as a competitor and excellent teacher spread. The competitive records of his students became legendary.

Mr. Trias appointed Mr. Koepfel 3rd Regional Director for the USKA where he developed the strongest region in the Association. The USKA Third Region dominated the tournament scene with early competitors such as Glenn Keeny, Bill Wallace, Parker Shelton, Jim McLain, Bob Yarnall, Victor Moore, Bob Bowles, Melvin Wise, Randy Holman, Jim Harrison and many more. Mr. Koepfel also continued to progress and learn his art and was eventually promoted to 7th Dan and Chief Instructor for Mr. Trias' Shuri-ryu system.

In 1981 Mr. Koepfel resigned from the United States Karate Association. A close introspection of his martial arts lead him to believe that self-improvement comes from continual life study. He looked for a new beginning. It took a great deal of soul searching and courage for him to leave behind what others might construe as having attained the "pinnacle of karate".

After resigning Mr. Koepfel began the search for an Okinawan karate and teachers that could provide him and his students with a sound foundation for the continuation of this life study. He was familiar with most of the Okinawan styles and had met many of the masters on trips to Okinawa. Eventually he decided upon an old Okinawan village karate called Matsumura Seito Shorin-ryu. It should be noted that of all the Matsumura lineage's, this system was never introduced into the Okinawa school systems in the early 1900's (as a part of the

physical education programs) and remained true to its martial nature. The lineage was a relatively short one. The Matsumura Seito descended primarily through family members; from Bushi Matsumura to Nabe Matsumura, to Hohan Soken, who taught five proficient senior students, (Kisei, Kuda, Oshiro, Arakaki and Nishihira), three of whom are significant to Mr. Koeppel. One of the Masters of this system, Fusei Kise, taught Mr. Ron Lindsey, 7th Dan Matsumura Seito Shorin-ryu. Mr. Lindsey in turn introduced the system to Mr. Koeppel. Later, Mr. Koeppel studied with another of Hohan Soken's senior students, Yuichi Kuda. Mr. Koeppel, because of his vast knowledge and experience, progressed quickly. He was eventually promoted to 8th Dan, Matsumura Seito Shorin-ryu by Yuichi Kuda, Hanshi. Through Master Koeppel's tireless efforts the Matsumura Seito system spread rapidly throughout his existing schools and students.

In 1997 Patrick McCarthy, noted author, sensei and Okinawan karate historian, wrote Mr. Koeppel a letter of introduction to meet Mr. Kosei Nishihira, one of Hohan Soken's senior students. McCarthy knew Mr. Nishihira, and also knew that the introduction would be of vital importance to Mr. Koeppel and his students. During the 1997 Okinawa World Karate Championships Mr. Koeppel traveled to Nishihara Village, Okinawa to meet and train with Mr. Nishihira. Mr. Nishihira was born in 1942, and became a student of Mr. Soken when he was 10 years old, right after Mr. Soken returned to Okinawa from Argentina. In fact, Mr. Soken was the young man's neighbor. Mr. Soken was Nishihira's only teacher, a relationship that lasted approximately 30 years, until the legendary grand master died. Mr. Koeppel worked out with Mr. Nishihira several times, authenticating and documenting the Matsumura Seito katas and bunkai. Koeppel Sensei was exhilarated with the affirmation that his kata, theories and methods were so close to that of Nishihira's. His years of research, training and study had paid off, and a liaison was formed between the two men that will benefit Mr. Koeppel's efforts to preserve and propagate Mr. Soken's tradition.

In 1984 Master Koeppel founded the United States Karate Do Kai. The organization's goal is to provide quality martial arts services to authentic, traditional karate practitioners. His philosophy has always been to assist others in their search for knowledge and training. In February 1996, Mr. Koeppel arranged for his personal friend, Mr. Takayoshi Nagamine, 9th Dan Hanshi, Matsubayashi Shorin-ryu to visit Mr. Patrick Beaumont's dojo, a USKK affiliate dojo in Ireland. Mr. Nagamine said he would go to Ireland only if Mr. Koeppel would accompany him. Together they provided seminars for Mr. Beaumont and his dojo. This was the first time an Okinawan karate master had ever been to Ireland. It is just one of many examples of Mr. Koeppel's efforts to help members of USKK return to authentic sources for the Okinawan karate training that they seek. Mr. Koeppel's efforts have been rewarded by a growing network of members and schools throughout the world and because of that effort he has been recognized and awarded certifications by the following entities and countries:

CHINA; Global Martial Arts Federation, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Dragon Sign Federation, Waling Tai Chi Martial Arts Federation, 10th Dan, Chinese Martial Arts (Wu Shu), Title, Ph.D., MA.

UNITED STATES; U.S.A. Karate Federation, U.S. representative to W.K.F., (Paris, France), Member of the U.S. governing body to the United States Olympic Committee, 9th Dan Karate, United States Karate Association, 7th Dan Karate.

SWEDEN; International Jujitsu Federation, 9th Dan Jujitsu

OKINAWA; Okinawan Matsumura Kempo Karate Kobudo Federation, Kuda Yuichi Hanshi, 8th Dan Karate, Okinawan Karate Do Renmei, 8th Dan Karate, Kenshin Kan Karate Do Federation, Kise Fusei Hanshi, 7th Dan Karate.

CANADA, SOUTH AMERICA, UNITED STATES; Pan American Karate Do Federation, 8th Dan Karate.

IRELAND; Irish Martial Arts Commission, 8th Dan Karate

INTERNATIONAL; World Karate Federation (WKF), Paris, France, Representative Body to the International Olympic Committee, 8th Dan Karate.

Mr. Koepfel is honored and humbled by certifications awarded by the Global Martial Arts Federation and U.S.A. Karate Federation of 10th Dan and 9th Dan respectively, but acknowledges 8th Dan, Matsumura Seito Shorin-ryu, Okinawan Matsumura Kempo Karate Kobudo Federation and Okinawan Karate Do Renmei.

It is undeniable that Master Phillip Koepfel has had a profound effect on the propagation and spread of karate-do throughout the Midwest, United States and World.

Interested martial arts practitioners may call **THE UNITED STATES KARATE-DO KAI**, (309) 691-5280, write the organization at the Executive Office, Hombu Dojo, P.O. Box 3771, Peoria, Illinois 61612-3771, or email at the address given below.