



KAZOKU

Ansei Ueshiro

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By Jerry Figgiani

Over fifty years ago, one man's decision to leave his home country has still left an impression on a lot of martial artists throughout the world. Ansei Ueshiro left Okinawa in 1962 at the request of O'Sensei Shoshin Nagamine to help spread Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. A lot of the top-ranking instructors in Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu here in the United States can trace their roots back to Sensei Ansei Ueshiro.

James K. Wax, the first American promoted to Shodan in Okinawa, was very instrumental in helping Sensei Ueshiro attain a special visa to come to the United States where he would then make his home. Sensei Wax was also influential in introducing Sensei Ueshiro to many of the American martial artists, especially in the Midwest and New York area. The road for Sensei Ueshiro was not an easy one to travel. Growing up in Okinawa, he was disabled due to injuries suffered during World War II with the invasion of Okinawa. Once in the United States, his challenges continued. Barely speaking any English, adjusting to the Western culture, and having no family here were major adjustments and obstacles that he would later overcome.

It is not surprising that Sensei Ueshiro overcame obstacles with fortitude and perseverance. He was a direct blood descendant of the Okinawan class of Bushi Warriors. He was taught karate by his father and what people may not realize is that he was the nephew of Ankichi Arakaki, one of O'Sensei Nagamine's instructors. It was this fortitude and perseverance that enabled Sensei Ueshiro to build an empire of established reputable martial arts dojos throughout the Midwest and the East Coast of the United States.

Because of a break in the communication between the Okinawan Honbu Dojo and Sensei Ueshiro here in the United States, another obstacle presented itself. In 1969, O'Sensei Nagamine sent over Chotoku Omine. At this time, there was a politically-driven correction in the Matsubayashi family. Some of the instructors decided to train with Omine Sensei while others pledged their loyalty to Ueshiro Sensei. A few of the reasons why this division occurred was because

Ueshiro Sensei did not want to conform to the way O'Sensei Nagamine was doing the kata. In addition, he felt O'Sensei Nagamine was being influenced by Japanese karate. Furthermore, Ueshiro Sensei created and added Fukuyugata Sandan to the Matsubayashi syllabus which did not go over well with the Honbu Dojo. He also introduced Oyo-Ten-Ren which was an across-the-floor exercise.

One of the instructors who remained loyal to Ueshiro Sensei was his first Shodan promoted here in the United States and the President and Founder of U.S. Shorin Ryu, Hanshi Ernie Ferrara. In speaking with Hanshi Ferrara, he stated, "I was closer to Sensei Ueshiro than my own father. Not only did he teach me karate, but he taught me many life lessons." What impressed Hanshi Ferrara were the physical skills that Ansei possessed. For example, Ueshiro Sensei's command of weapons was uncanny despite the loss of his fingers.

Another of Ueshiro's loyal followers, who is still true to Ansei Ueshiro's teachings today, is Kancho Terry Maccarrone. He established Karate U.S.A. and opened his first dojo in 1966. What Kancho remembers was that Ansei Ueshiro's classes were very physical. When Kancho Maccarrone reflects back on those beginning days, he laughs, "Classes were geared with the intent to eliminate people who would not work hard. It was rare to see the same people twice; classes were just that hard." He also stated, "Ueshiro Sensei would never use the words yame or stop." Though Kancho Maccarrone was an original student, he was never Ansei's first choice. However, it was through Kancho Maccarrone's hard work ethics, business background, and because he was always the last one standing, Ueshiro Sensei encouraged him to become a dojo owner. His commitment to Ansei, which he has kept to this day, was to never close the dojo.

Sho Shin Sha translates to "the beginning." As martial artists, we have to realize the decisions we make today not only affect what happens to us in the future but can also greatly affect and make a difference in other people's lives. 

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