

Auckland West Goju Ryu Karate Club

Higaonna Morio Sensei was born on the 25th day of December in 1938, in Naha city, in the Okinawa Prefecture of Japan. In 1952, when Morio Sensei was 14 years old, he began to learn karate from his father who, as a Kobayashi-Shorin Ryu karate practitioner, taught his son rudimentary karate techniques.

In 1956, Morio Higaonna Sensei formally enrolled at Chojun Miyagi Sensei's Garden Dojo. Chojun Miyagi Sensei had passed away 3 years ago in 1953 and teaching in the dojo was conducted by the late Chojun Sensei's senior students. As An'ichi Miyagi Sensei was responsible for teaching the junior students at the Garden Dojo during this time, he therefore became Morio Sensei's primary teacher. Thus, a close bond was forged between sensei and student, which continued over the next 5 decades until An'ichi Sensei's passing. Other senior members of the dojo such as Eiichi Miyazato Sensei (who was the most senior member of the Garden Dojo group), also gave Morio Sensei karate instruction from time to time. Apart from keeping up an intensive training regime, Morio Sensei also helped An'ichi Miyagi Sensei do maintenance work at the Garden Dojo in his spare time.

In June 1956 the Jundokan was jointly established by the most senior students of Chojun Sensei, and Miyazato Sensei was elected as the head of this dojo. Most students from the Garden Dojo including Morio Sensei soon began training in this new dojo. 1957 the dojo awarded Morio Sensei a diligence award for his intensive training. Morio Sensei was 18 years old at that time.

In May of 1961, Morio Higaonna Sensei began to teach karate in the Yoyogi Dojo in Tokyo. The Yoyogi dojo had originally taught another style of karate, however the owner of the dojo and the dojo students greatly approved of Morio Higaonna Sensei's teaching methods, and subsequently converted to Goju-Ryu in order to train under Higaonna Sensei. In the following decades, Yoyogi became world-renowned for both the toughness and the exceptional quality of its training regime, as well as the many world-class karateka who had trained with the dojo at one time or another.

Morio Higaonna Sensei also taught karate at the College of Humanities and Sciences in the Nihon University from May 1965 onwards.

In April 1966, Morio Higaonna Sensei received his 5th Dan in Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate-do from the head of the Jundokan who, at that time was still Eiichi Miyazato Sensei.

In January of 1967, Morio Higaonna Sensei received his Menkyo Kaiden (免許皆伝) from Eiichi Miyazato Sensei. The Menkyo Kaiden is a graduation certificate which implies that the recipient had received the total transmission in all aspects of the art from the issuing party, and he is qualified to teach the style of karate independently. This award is usually issued by the head of the

organization the recipient is affiliated to, rather than the recipient's immediate sensei.

In April of 1967, Morio Higaonna Sensei assumed the position of karate Shihan (Teacher) in the Nihon University College of Humanities and Sciences.

In May of 1968, Morio Higaonna Sensei accepted an invitation by the YMCA and travelled to Spokane in the USA to conduct a series of demonstrations and lectures about karate. The trip was a success and Morio Sensei received an award from the Mayor of Spokane for his well-acclaimed efforts to promote karate in the USA.

On 10th of October 1970, Morio Higaonna was invited to represent Goju-Ryu Karate do at a special demonstration, during the first World Karate Tournament organised by WUKO. This event took place in the Tokyo Budokan in Japan. Morio Sensei received a special letter of appreciation from WUKO for his demonstration.

Morio Higaonna Sensei was once again invited to demonstrate in the Third World Karate Tournament organised by WUKO in 1972. Once again Morio Sensei received a special letter of appreciation from the organisers.

In May 1975 Morio Higaonna Sensei accepted an invitation by the French Karate Association to conduct a teaching tour in France for younger practitioners as well as for Yudansha (black belt) practitioners. In 1977, Morio Higaonna Sensei was once again invited to teach in France by the French Karate Association.

In July of 1979, the IOGKF (International Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate Federation) was formed in Poole, England at the first ever IOGKF International Gasshuku. Morio Higaonna Sensei assumed the role of IOGKF's first Chief Instructor and Chairman. This organisation was backed by the senior students of the late Chojun Miyagi sensei, including Seiko Kina Sensei, An'ichi Miyagi Sensei, Jitsui Yogi Sensei, Seijin Nakamoto Sensei, Kiei Tomoyose Sensei, Shunshin Furugen Sensei and Shuichi Aragaki Sensei, as well as Ken Miyagi (Chojun Sensei's 4th son). Under the banner of the IOGKF, Morio Higaonna Sensei would travel tirelessly to teach Goju-Ryu karate in the following decades. At the height of it, he would travel to more than 120 countries each year to conduct gassuku, seminars and other training or demonstration events throughout the world.

In 1980, the Japanese Government invited Morio Higaonna Sensei to give a special demonstration during the official state reception ceremony held in honour of the President of Mexico's state visit to Japan. The demonstration was held in Akasaka in Tokyo.

In July 1981, the IOGKF held its first World Budosai and Tournament in the Budokan in Naha-city, in conjunction with the 60th Anniversary of Naha-City's founding. (The modern city government was founded on 20 May 1921, though Naha as a port-town had existed since medieval times.)

In 1982, Morio Higaonna Sensei founded his own dojo in his own home in Naha, Okinawa. His dojo was known by the name of "Higaonna Dojo". In the following

decades, this dojo would be the port of call for many senior black belt members of the IOGKF and other schools and styles seeking to train in the traditional Okinawan way.

When the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) aired the documentary “Way of the warrior” in 1983, the episode on Karate featured Goju-Ryu and focused on Morio Higaonna Sensei, his training methods and his concepts on karate. The program was widely watched and very well-received.

1983, Morio Higaonna Sensei began to liaise with martial-arts practitioners in the Fukien/Fujian Province of China through his representative in China, Lam King Fung Sensei. This was in order to research further into the history and origins of Naha-te in Fuzhou.

In September 1983 Morio Higaonna Sensei established the IOGKF Hombu Dojo in Santiago, USA. For the next few decades, the IOGKF would continue to maintain a strong presence in North America.

On 29 May 1984, Morio Higaonna Sensei received his 8th Dan in Goju-Ryu Karate from Yuchoku Higa Sensei acting in his capacity as the President of the Okinawan Karate and Kobudo Association (沖縄空手・古武道連盟, this is one of several umbrella organisations in Okinawa under which most Okinawan karate organisations and schools eventually became members of. The four umbrella organisations subsequently merged in 2008 to form the Okinawa Dentou Karate Shinkoukai. The IOGKF is a prominent member of this greater organisation.)

In April of 1988, almost exactly a century after Kanryo Higaonna Sensei departed from Fuzhou, and half a century since the late Chojun Miyagi Sensei last visited China, Morio Higaonna Sensei led a historic delegation of Goju-Ryu practitioners to visit Fuzhou, where they were received jointly by the Mayor of Fuzhou City, Fujian Province Wushu (Martial Arts) Association and the Fuzhou City Wushu Association. One of the main purposes of this delegation was to search for information about Ryu Ryu Ko (ルールーコウ) and to engage the Fuzhou City Wushu Association to search for Ryu Ryu Ko. The other purpose of the delegation was to study traditional Fuzhou Wushu and through this process discover more about the origins of Naha-te. This meeting would pave the way for many future exchanges between the Goju-Ryu and the Fuzhou martial art community.

In September 1988, the IOGKF assisted the Fuzhou Wushu Association in organising an “International Budo Meet” in which martial artists from the Fuzhou Wushu and Okinawan martial-art traditions both demonstrated their respective techniques.

In October 1989, under the direction of Morio Higaonna Sensei, the IOGKF held an International Karate-do Tournament in Santiago USA. An’ichi Miyagi Sensei presided over the tournament as its guest of honour.

On 8 June 1990, Morio Higaonna Sensei was invited to conduct a Budo Demonstration in New York in the UN headquarters.

On the 24th of August 1990, Morio Higaonna Sensei conducted a master's-level demonstration during the First World Okinawan Karate and Kobudo Festival. This event was organised by the Okinawan Karate and Kobudo Association (沖縄空手・古武道連盟). In the following decades Higaonna Sensei would continue to support this event by conducting seminars or gassuku sessions on behalf of the organisers during the festival.

On 18th of October 1991, the IOGKF held a Goju-Ryu Karate Technical Seminar and All America Tournament in Arkansas in the USA, with Morio Higaonna Sensei presiding over the event as the Chief Instructor and lecturer. Morio Higaonna Sensei was awarded a commendation by the Governor of Arkansas, Mr. Bill Clinton (later the President of the United States of America). The following day, the Mayor of Fort Smith, Arkansas, designated 18th of October (the day on which the IOGKF seminar was held) as "Morio Higaonna Day", and made Morio Higaonna Sensei a Honorary Citizen of Fort Smith City.

In February 1992 the governor of the state of Texas awarded Morio Higaonna Sensei the honorary title of Admiral of the Texas Navy in appreciation of his achievements in promoting karate in the state of Texas, USA. On the 2nd of June 1992, representatives from the office of the Vice-President of the USA and the state of Texas jointly presented Morio Higaonna Sensei with the title of Admiral of the Texas Navy.

In 1995, Morio Higaonna Sensei became the karate and unarmed combat instructor of the Kremlin Guard, the Police Forces and the Secret Police Forces of the Russian Federation.

In April 1995 the IOGKF established its Japan Hombu Dojo Ryubukan in Tokyo.

In 1998, the prestigious and authoritative Nihon Kobudo Kyokai formerly recognised Okinawan Goju-ryu as a form of Japanese Kobudo, and it appointed Morio Higaonna Sensei as the representative-master of the Goju-ryu system and the IOGKF as the representative organisation within their association. This was a historic moment in the history of Goju-Ryu, 65 years after the Dai Nippon Butokukai recognised Goju-Ryu as a Japanese Martial Art. (This pre-Second World-War organisation which had a semi-official status, and a patron who was a prince of the Japanese Imperial Dynasty is now defunct. Its role has been largely replaced by the Nihon Kobudo Kyokai, a subsidiary of the government-backed organisation which also manages the Tokyo Budokan.)

In July 1999, IOGKF held an extremely successful European Gassuku in Hamburg, Germany. At the end of the Gassuku, the Mayor of Hamburg presented Morio Higaonna Sensei with a letter of appreciation on behalf of the City of Hamburg.

In February 2000, the Chairman of the Nihon Kobudo Kyokai and Nihon Budōkan, former Minister for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan Mr. Masajuro Shiokawa awarded Morio Higaonna Sensei a prestigious commendation for his efforts in preserving and promoting Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate do.

On the 31st of March 2001, The Venezuelan President presented Morio Higaonna Sensei with the Order of Vicente Emilio Sojo (A Cultural Award) for his achievements in introducing and developing karate in Venezuela.

In July 2004, more than 700 participants from more than 36 countries attended the 4th IOGKF World Budosai held in the Okinawan Prefecture Budokan, in Naha City. Morio Higaonna Sensei presided over the ceremonies, led in the training during the gassuku, and personally trained the black belt participants.

19 September 2005, Morio Higaonna conducted training for a hundred members of the Kremlin Guard in the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin presented Morio Higaonna Sensei with a commendation in appreciation of his efforts. The Kremlin commissioned a Karate do-gi and black belt with the following title emblazoned on them : “Morio Higaonna. Commander of the Kremlin Guard”. These two items were subsequently on display in the Kremlin Museum.

On the 10th of February 2007, three renowned masters of karate, Morio Higaonna Sensei, Hirokazu Kanazawa Sensei and Hoshu Ikeda Sensei held a widely acclaimed karate seminar and demonstration in the Tokyo Kudan Kaikan.

On 22nd of June 2007, The Chairman of the Naha City Cultural Association (那覇市文化協会) awarded Morio Higaonna Sensei a commendation for his immense contribution to the preservation and development Okinawan karate.

On 28th of August 2007, Morio Higaonna Sensei was accorded the 10th Dan rank in Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate do by Chojun Miyagi’s last disciple, An’ichi Miyagi Sensei. As the students and direct successors of Chojun Miyagi Sensei’s Goju-Ryu system, An’ichi Miyagi Sensei and Shuichi Aragaki Sensei also issued a letter of declaration recognising Morio Higaonna Sensei as the third-generation grandmaster and successor of Goju-Ryu. On 10th of November 2007, the umbrella organisation Okinawa Karate and Kobudo Association issued its confirmation of Morio Higaonna’s 10th Dan status.

On the 29th of March 2008, Morio Higaonna Sensei demonstrated Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate in the Festival de Arts Martiaux in Paris, France. This was a global event involving more than 40 types of martial arts from more than 40 countries. Tetsuji Nakamura Sensei (IOGKF Vice-Chief Instructor and Chief Instructor for Canada) acted as Higaonna Sensei’s uke (partner) during this demonstration.

In July 2008, IOGKF held its 5th World Budosai in the Okinawan prefecture Budokan. More than 1000 participants from more than 50 countries trained together under the instruction of Morio Higaonna Sensei and other senior instructors of the IOGKF.

In 2010, Morio Higaonna Sensei led a delegation of IOGKF members in a historic visit to Fuzhou whereby he met with representatives from the Tiger Style and White Crane Style martial artists. Members of the delegation included the (then) Vice-Chief Instructor of IOGKF, Tetsuji Nakamura Sensei, and the IOGKF-China Chief Instructor Lam King Fung Sensei. The senior members of the delegation performed Okinawan Goju-Ryu Kata at the White-Crane Boxing Memorial Hall before a notable audience of White Crane Boxing representatives. Their demonstration was well received and widely covered by the media.

Under Higaonna Sensei's leadership over the years, leading the IOGKF towards the forging of a positive relationship with the Fuzhou Martial Arts community, in Feb 2011 IOGKF-China established the "Kanryo Higaonna Memorial Dojo" in Fuzhou. Morio Higaonna Sensei presided over the opening ceremony of the dojo together with the Chairman of the Fuzhou Wushu Association, Professor Hu Jin Huan. Also present were Tetsuji Nakamura Sensei and Lam King Fung Sensei. This was the first Okinawan Goju-Ryu dojo ever to be established in Fuzhou, a city where Kanryo Higaonna Sensei first learnt quanfa (Chinese Boxing) more than 130 years ago. During this trip Higaonna Sensei also visited the oldest White Crane Boxing Dojo in Fuzhou, as well as the Quan Zhou Shaolin Temple, where Morio Higaonna Sensei and his delegation demonstrated Goju-Ryu kata and Kakie to an audience of distinguished guests. The event was covered and well-received by the media and the local martial arts community.

On 12th of October 2012, during the IOGKF Euro-Asia Gasshuku held in Moldova, Higaonna Sensei was invited to the Moldavian President's Office to receive a special award from the President of Moldova, Nicolae Timofti, in recognition of Morio Sensei's many years of contribution to spread traditional karate in Moldova as well as the advancement of friendly relations between Moldova and Japan. The award which Morio Sensei received, "The Order of Honour" was the highest award that foreigners could receive in that country. Morio Sensei first introduced Okinawan Goju-Ryu to Moldova in 1989 when it was a territory of the former Soviet Union, and it has been taught as part of the unarmed combat syllabus for the Moldova Special Forces since.

In July 2012, IOGKF held its 6th World Budosai in the Budokan in Naha City, Okinawa. The event was an immense success involving more than 900 participants from more than 50 different countries and intensive coverage by the media, and the closing ceremony was attended by the Member of the Japanese Parliament for Okinawa and other high-ranking public officials. During this Budosai Morio Higaonna announced that he was stepping down from the position of Chief Instructor of the IOGKF and Tetsuji Nakamura Sensei will henceforth assume the position of Chief Instructor of the IOGKF.

On 8th of May 2013, the Okinawan Government presented Morio Higaonna Sensei with an award and title recognising him as an Intangible Cultural

Treasure of Okinawa, a recognition of his many years of dedication and preservation of Goju-ryu Karate, which itself was an important part of the Okinawan culture and history. A title such as this is the highest an individual may receive in Japan for the martial arts and it is only award to a handful of grandmasters in the modern history of Japan