

'40 Years Of German Precision.'

By Michael LaBATLUS

Introduction

At the age of fifty-four Shihan HOFFMAN holds a 6th Dan in Shorin Ryu Karate, 5th Dan Tae Kwon Do, 1st Dan Budokan Karate and is a Master of Shoalin Weaponry. He is also the founder and chief instructor of Tae Kyon Karate.

Apart from his martial art qualification he is a Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine and holds an Advanced Diploma in Medical Applied Science (Myotherapy) R.M.I.T. (Neuromuscular Skeletal Dysfunction)

Shihan HOFFMAN also spent several years employed by the Victorian government performing security services and two and a half years in the Australian Military performing security peace-keeping duties in Malaysia between 1968 and 1969.

Interview

Conducted by Sensei Michael LaBATLUS with Shihan John HOFFMAN on Thursday the 11th of May 2000.

M.L. *Shihan HOFFMAN how does it feel to have accomplished 40 years in martial arts?*

J.H. I am very content with my accomplishments so far however I am still looking forward to passing along my knowledge and experience on to my students in the future, which I gain a great deal of satisfaction from. I also

still enjoy participating in the dojo and wish to continue to refine my skills and knowledge so I think I still have a great deal to look forward to.

M.L. *Where did you first start practicing martial arts?*

J.H. I started practicing Karate at the Tri Boys Youth Club in Northcote Victoria which was very basic compared to today's standard of martial arts. I can remember when you saw a black belt your eyes just about popped out of your head because there were so few around.

M.L. *What have been some of your highlights over the last forty years?*

J.H. Many. Traveling overseas, the acceptance which I have received when living in different communities especially in South East Asia and the life long friends that I have made through martial arts. There have also been a few heartaches thrown in for good measure but as they say what doesn't kill you makes you more resilient.

M.L. *Who have been your most influential instructors?*

J.H. Sifu John COLLAR Shoalin weapons master and 9th Dan Tae Kwon Do, Professor Yoshihide Shinzato 8th Dan Shorin-Ryu Karate, Alley THEOH 6th Dan Tae Kwon-Do, Liow CHOW 4th Dan Tae Kwon-Do and Lim Tee Tee 4th

Dan Budokan Karate and Chinese Art.



M.L. *Which countries have you practiced in and obtained qualifications in?*

J.H. Japan, Korea, Brazil, U.S.A., India, Malaysia and Australia of course.

M.L. *You obviously do not believe in limiting yourself to certain philosophies, techniques or styles?*

J.H. No, I believe that if a student wishes to become an instructor he/she should have a strong grounding in more than one art. That is why I have taken the time and effort to obtain a broad experience in a variety of martial arts.

M.L. ***How has your study of medicine influenced your martial arts?***

J.H. My study of medicine has allowed me to become a much more rounded practitioner and teacher of martial arts. Due to my medical studies I am able to scientifically explain what effect any given strike will have on any part of the human body. I am also able to scientifically target pressure points, joints and other more vulnerable parts of the human body with pinpoint accuracy. In relation to teaching martial arts my medical studies have also enabled me to instruct in such a manner that my students have been able to avoid long-term repetitive strain injuries which can and does occur when martial arts are instructed in an incorrect manner. I encourage all martial artists to obtain as much knowledge as possible in the workings of the human body and the medical field is quite a useful reference point.

M.L. ***How can students prevent themselves from obtaining repetitive strain injuries and other injuries in martial arts?***

J.H. There are many preventive factors however some of the more obvious ones I believe are a good warm up, a good cooling down stretch, not to continually hit hard objects and don't perform movements in a manner which continually place incorrect pressure on joints. An instructor must also be able to assess a student's anatomical and physiological structure so that he/she does not instruct the student to perform movements which may be detrimental to the student's long-term health.

M.L. ***How did you come about to be a master of shoalin weapons?***

J.H. In Malaysia there is a strong Chinese culture and Sifu COLLAR learnt most of his skills from the resident monks which he passed onto me, however, I have also practiced weapons with various other non Chinese instructors such as Professor SHINZATO. My studies in weapons commenced as early as my travels to India in 1966.

M.L. ***What is your favorite weapon and why?***

J.H. Actually I don't have a favorite weapon. It depends simply on the application of the weapon, the availability of one and the area which the weapon is to be used in. For example a quarter staff would not be my preferred choice of weapon if I was in an elevator however that is not to say that one could not be used in such an area. A good practitioner will be multi skilled and have the versatility to use most weapons in any scenario.

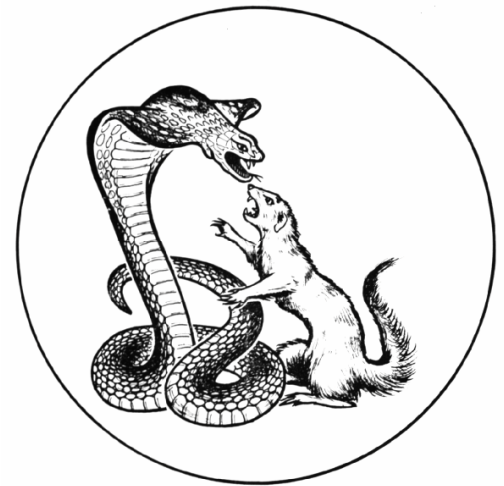
M.L. ***What do you consider to be more important the practice of weapons or unarmed combat and what influence does one have on the other?***

J.H. Unarmed combat is more beneficial however there has to be a reciprocal arrangement

M.L. ***Can you please explain the literal meaning of Tae Kyon Karate?***

J.H. Tae Kyon is more commonly known as Tae Kwon-Do which for the uninitiated is a Korean form of self-defense. Tae, (being feet), Kwon, (being hands) and Do, (being method). Whereas Karate is a Japanese form of self-

defense and Kara being (empty) and Te (hand). Since I have spent several years studying both arts I have combined the names as my system is a blend of those arts and others.



M.L. ***What is the significance of the Snake and Mongoose?***

J.H. The mongoose represents a constant being whereas there is only one variety of that particular animal unlike snakes where there are numerous varieties hence if a snake comes across a mongoose the snake will have a pretty good idea as to how a mongoose behaves if it has previously come across one, however, the mongoose will have to be wary as different snakes have different methods of stalking and killing their pray therefore unless the mongoose has previously come across that particular type of snake it will have to be more cunning and skillful to overcome its enemy. Hence, the emblem not only represents the life and death struggle that is taking place but also encourage students to study and familiarize themselves with different techniques and movements. The studying of animal techniques in martial arts is well documented and practiced.

M.L. ***When did you commence Tae Kyon Karate?***

J.H. I started Tae Kyon Karate in 1977 and my first dojo's were in Heidelberg, Bentleigh and Watsonia which are suburbs in Melbourne.

M.L. ***How would you classify Tae Kyon Karate?***

J.H. Tae Kyon Karate is definitely not a sport orientated martial art. I believe the essence of martial arts is to gain the skills necessary to be able to defend yourself if the unfortunate circumstances arise. Nevertheless, if an individual student wished to compete in competitions I would not discourage him or her, as the experience of competing against other can be beneficial.

M.L. ***What direction would you like Tae Kyon Karate to take in the future?***

J.H. Obviously I would like to see my art form expand within the Australian community and continue to grow in both nature and content.

M.L. ***What do you believe to be the significance of Dan Ranks?***

J.H. I classify 1st Dan to be the rank of an assistant instructor. 2nd Dan to be that of a regional instructor where I encourage them to open a school or club to confirm their knowledge within the art and commence to instruct others. 3rd Dan is that of a national instructor and qualified to attend other schools within our system and instruct. 4th Dan is what I consider to be an international teacher and examiner. He/she may attend anywhere in the world to open up his or her branch of our system. 5th Dan is what I consider to be a

master of the style. 6th Dan is similar to a PHD in martial art and grants the right to formulate and teach your own system. 7th and onwards is professorship.

M.L. ***How many Kata's are in the Tae Kyon Karate system and what is their importance?***

J.H. There are eleven Kata's in the system. As they are a combination of Tae Kyon, Karate and Shoalin movements it provides the students with the basis of fundamental techniques, rhythm, direction, focus and timing.

M.L. ***What significance does one-step sparring have within Tae Kyon Karate?***

J.H. One-step sparring is very necessary. Obviously it is conducted with a partner and therefore the variable of distance, size, strength and speed is a component which allows the student to become familiar in counteracting and assessing different threats.

M.L. ***Your style of one step sparring is probably the most involved and technically advanced I have witnessed.***

Where does this come from?

J.H. From the previously mentioned systems, my medical studies and my own philosophies. I would prefer my students to be able to think and act for themselves rather than just mimic my movements.

M.L. ***Your seminars and lessons are structured in an informal manner compared to other schools and system I have practiced at. Can you please***

explain your reason for this?

J.H. I expect my student to show and display the courtesy and respect which I believe I have earned however I do not wish students to feel that I am unapproachable, which has been prevalent in some of the schools that I have practice at over the years. I both enjoy and encourage interaction with my students which allows for a fantastic exchange of information between my students and myself.

M.L. ***What are some of your basic philosophies in regards to your practice within the dojo?***

J.H. First of all I strongly believe that I must teach in a manner that is as close to reality as possible however safety is also a major consideration. I also believe that a student must be both physically, spiritually and mentally stimulated and challenged in each class to provide a high level of enthusiasm.

M.L. ***Many traditional schools still use Japanese and Korean terminology in their classes. Do you and what are your views in regard to this?***

J.H. Although it is good for students to expand their verbal and communications skills, from my years of experience, I have found that students gain a greater understanding of the actual martial art if I teach it in their native language rather than the origins of the martial art which I am teaching. For example if I were to return to Germany and instruct I would teach in German so there would be no unnecessary confusion caused simply by a communication barrier.

M.L. *What words of advice do you have for someone commencing in martial art practice?*

J.H. First of all the person should ask himself or herself why they wish to study martial arts. I then recommend that he/she compare three to four different schools and systems before making their decision wisely. Whilst visiting the different schools I also advise them to question the instructor, politely of course, in relation to his/her qualifications.

M.L. *Do you instruct at one dojo regularly?*

J.H. Unfortunately at this stage my schedule does not permit me to but I hold approximately three to four seminars a year which run over a weekend and visit our different schools as much as possible.

M.L. *Shihan HOFFMAN I would like to thank you for your patience in conducting this interview and maintaining your calm even though I did lose half the interview after hitting the wrong button.*

J.H. Yes Michael you do continually test my patience.

About The Author

Sensei Michael LaBATLUS has been studying martial arts for the last fifteen years and currently holds a 3rd Dan in Tae Kyon Karate, 2nd Dan in Shotokan Karate and a 1st Dan in Tang Soo Do. He has been employed in the security industry for the last eleven years.