

Ninjutsu's Emerging Leaders Speak Candidly

Is the True Leader of the Clan About to Step From the Shadows?

By L. R. Ferolino

Upon hearing the term "ninja," the average American relates to an image which has been conveyed to the public through countless movies, videotapes, posters, books and other types of media — the image of the masked assassin, clad in his black outfit and carrying numerous exotic-looking weapons. To Americans, the ninja is deadly. He's a vicious warrior constantly in search of an evil deed in need of completion.

The public has been exposed to so much of this exploitation that it's difficult to distinguish between what's true and what's false about the art of ninjutsu. Many individuals don't even think

of a "ninja" as a practitioner of "ninjutsu" — which is, in fact, a martial art! People are so fascinated by what they see and hear that their curiosity often leads to sheer confusion.

And this entire situation may have stemmed from the Japanese tradition of passing on the secret knowledge of ninjutsu to subsequent generations. Even the legitimate instructors of today have had to rely on this type of information. In other words, the truth could have been and still can be twisted (for whatever purpose), and who would even know or challenge it?

Recently it's been said that Americans are not receiving the whole truth surrounding the art of ninjutsu — not



even from the top instructors. R. G. Bowling, special advisor to the American Ninjutsu Federation, recently spent a week traveling through Japan to meet and train with ninjutsu grandmasters Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi and Shoto Tanemura. Bowling, who instructs a class with over 100 students at the Kadena Air Force Base on Okinawa, Japan and heads the largest American Ninjutsu Federation chapter in the world, also met with nationally known historian and scholar Mr. Okuse (the 75-year-old former mayor—1968-75—who oversaw the building of Iga Village), Mr. Yunoki (former mayor of Koka Village) and with local dignitaries, businessmen and other Japanese citizens.

What Bowling had to report from his trip is truly astounding! It seems the

top ninjutsu instructors here in the U.S. aren't so highly regarded in Japan. Furthermore, the Japanese apparently have chosen Tanemura as their leader, and the emergence of this prominent individual into the public eye is intended to reveal more information which should clear up some of the confusion and misunderstanding.

"Tanemura is, in their eyes, true ninja," Bowling said. Until now, Tanemura has remained on the sideline, so to speak. However, according to Bowling, the former instructor and police officer with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Academy now has some things to straighten out.

A former student of the late Toshitugu Takamatsu (as was Hatsumi), Tanemura chose to break away from

the bujinkan system. Apparently, he had a different opinion as to what path the art of ninjutsu should take. Tanemura, after training for 30 years, has developed the system of Genbukan Ninpo.

Regarding his visit with Tanemura, Bowling stated, "He was so kind. He told me many secret things. Also, he showed me a history link of all his family. I am the only American he showed this to. He showed me old pictures of Steve Hayes in his family album and told me many different things. Tanemura said my spirit caused him to trust me with many things he has told no one else."

Bowling was invited to become a personal student of Tanemura's. "He asked me to please come and study



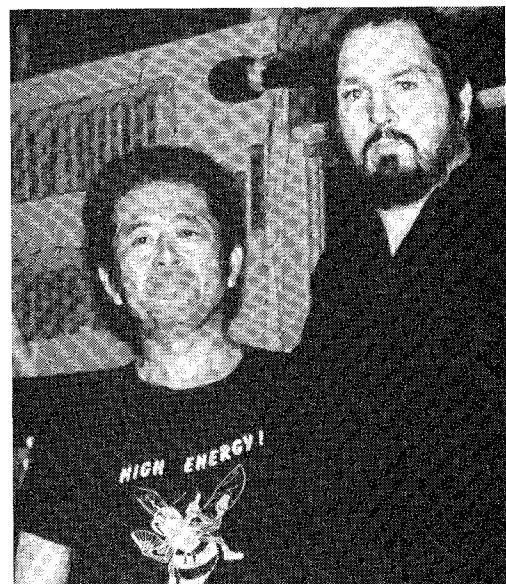
R.G. Bowling, special advisor to the American Ninjutsu Federation, training with chapter members in Okinawa, Japan; Bowling is the one kneeling in front. These members are predominantly armed forces personnel.

ninpo, and be his partner in history — because soon he believes I will know total spirit. He told me many Japanese called him on the phone and said I was different from Hayes. Ten years ago he taught Hayes. I saw pictures of that. Hayes was first accepted in the

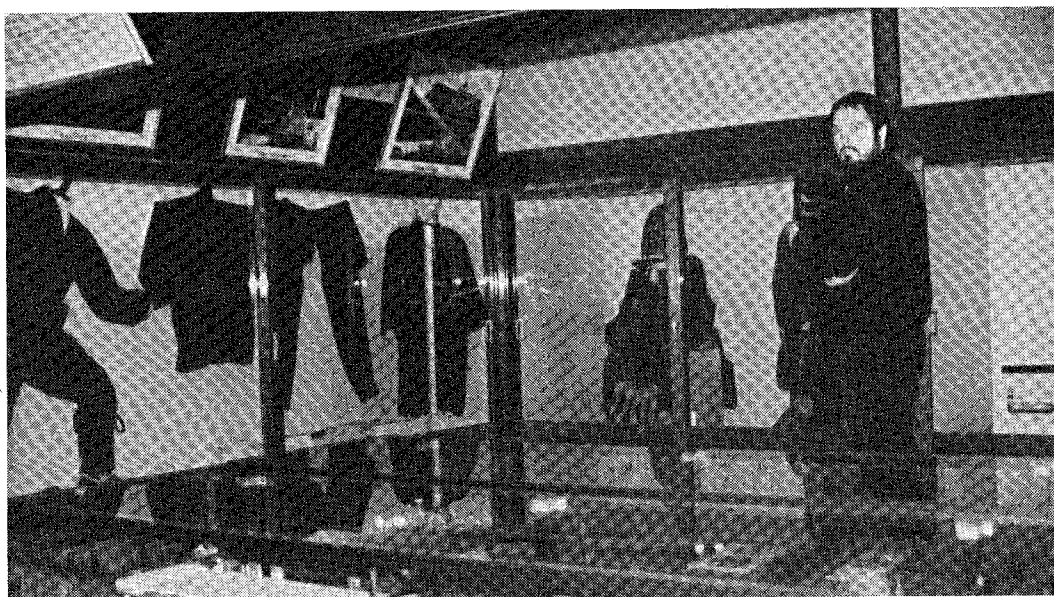
U.S. for ninja. He has never been accepted here by the people in the main flow of ninpo.”

Hayes, the well-known togakure ryu ninjutsu instructor in America, studied in Japan under Hatsumi. Hatsumi was named the 34th soke by Takamatsu

after over 20 years of training. It's interesting to note that the 32nd soke, Shinryunen Matsamitsu Toda, apparently named Takamatsu the 33rd soke when Takamatsu was 19 years old (according to an article by Ilan Gattegno, which appeared in *The Best of*



Tanemura, grandmaster of the genbukan ninpo system, invited Bowling to become his personal student. Top right: Bowling with Dr. Hatsumi at the 34th grandmaster's training area in Japan. Above left: SFC Townsend and Bowling were instrumental in developing the ANF chapter on Okinawa, Japan. Above right: Bowling and nationally known historian and scholar Mr. Okuse conversing over tea at Okuse's home. Left: The ninja museum Bowling visited on his trip.



Black Belt Ninja, issue number two)! Many would question exactly how much Takamatsu could have possibly learned by so young an age. It could be that Takamatsu developed some techniques himself.

“Yunoki and Okuse said that Hatsumi only studied bo from Takamatsu for three years only. Takamatsu died and Hatsumi claimed to be full ninja,” Bowling said. “But everyone here says the true ninja is not Hatsumi, but Tanemura — that there was no art of togakure ryu until the 1950s when Hatsumi started it. The Japanese believe soon the martial arts world will turn away from Hatsumi due to his ways.”

Tanemura, Bowling stated, wants to come to the U.S. to teach — once enough students express interest in learning the art. Tanemura is also completing a book at this time and asked Bowling to assist him in finding a publisher and in completing it.

American Ninjutsu Federation administrators plan future involvement with Tanemura’s Genbukan Ninpo system. However, they’ve stated it’s not their intention to instigate any controversy between Hatsumi and Tanemura.

“The original intent of the ANF was to promote the concept of sport ninjutsu,” according to Dr. Jerry Beasley, founder of the American Ninjutsu Federation. “According to my research, a form of sport ninjutsu would follow the introduction of traditional ninjutsu as a natural course of events.”

Beasley further stated that, after the concept of sport ninjutsu was introduced, a combat ninjutsu system was developed under the director of former togakure ryu ninjutsu instructor Cliff Lenderman of Tacoma, Wash.

“I’m happy that they (the Japanese) have accepted me as they have,” Bowling stated, noting that the Japanese are unhappy with the extent to which their art has been commercially exploited in the U.S. for personal gain. “I’m proud to be a member of the ANF and I believe now I have a mission to spread the true word.”

Evidently, Americans can expect more information on ninjutsu in the near future.

About the author: L. R. Ferolino, through an association with the American Ninjutsu Federation, was able to uncover this information concerning Shoto Tanemura. Look for a follow-up piece in the near future.

